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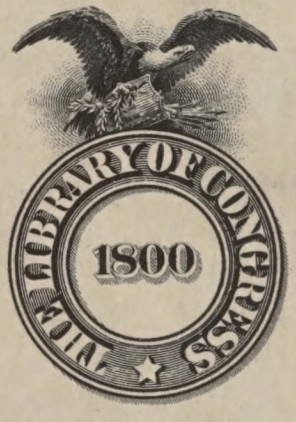

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WAYSIDERS

"Inside the shop was Festus Clasby himself."

WAYSIDERS

STORIES OF CONNACHT

By

SEUMAS O'KELLY

Author of
"The Shuiler's Child," "The Lady of Deerpark," "The Bribe," &c.

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THE CAN WITH THE DIAMOND NOTCH

I

HE name stood out in chaste white letters from the black background of the signboard. Indeed the name might be said to spring from the landscape, for this shop jumped from its rural setting with an air of aggression. It was a commercial oasis on a desert of grass. It proclaimed the clash of two civilisations. There were the hills, pitched round it like the galleries of some vast amphitheatre, rising tier upon tier to the blue of the sky. There was the yellow road, fantastic in its frolic down to the valley. And at one of its wayward curves was the shop, the shop of Festus Clasby, a foreign growth upon the

landscape, its one long window crowded with sombre merchandise, its air that of established, cob-web respectability.

Inside the shop was Festus Clasby himself, like some great masterpiece in its ancient frame. He was the product of the two civilisations, a charioteer who drove the two fiery steeds of Agricolo and Trade with a hand of authority. He was a man of lands and of shops. His dark face, framed in darker hair and beard, was massive and square. Behind the luxurious growth of hair the rich blood glowed on the clear skin. His chest had breadth, his limbs were great, showing girth at the hips and power at the calves. His eyes were large and dark, smouldering in soft velvety tones. The nose was long, the nostrils expressive of a certain animalism, the mouth looked eloquent. His voice was low, of an agreeable even quality, floating over the boxes and barrels of his shop like a chant. His words never jarred, his views were vaguely comforting, based on accepted conventions, expressed in round, soft, lulling platitudes. His manner was serious, his movements deliberate, the great bulk of the shoulders looming up in unconscious

but dramatic poses in the curiously uneven lighting of the shop. His hands gave the impression of slowness and a moderate skill; they could make up a parcel on the counter without leaving ugly laps; they could perform a minor surgical operation on a beast in the fields without degenerating to butchery; and they would always be doing something, even if it were only rolling up a ball of twine. His clothes exuded a faint suggestion of cinnamon, nutmeg and caraway seeds.

Festus Clasby would have looked the part in any notorious position in life; his shoulders would have carried with dignity the golden chain of office of the mayoralty of a considerable city; he would have looked a perfect chairman of a jury at a Coroner's inquest; as the Head of a pious Guild in a church he might almost be confused with the figures of the stained glass windows; marching at the head of a brass band he would symbolise the conquering hero; as an undertaker he would have reconciled one to death. There was no technical trust which men would not have reposed in him, so perfectly was he wrought as a human casket. As

it was, Festus Clasby filled the most fatal of all occupations to dignity without losing his tremendous illusion of respectability. The hands which cut the bacon and the tobacco, turned the taps over pint measures, scooped bran and flour into scales, took herrings out of their barrels, rolled up sugarsticks in shreds of paper for children, were hands whose movements the eyes of no saucy customer dared follow with a gleam of suspicion. Not once in a lifetime was that casket tarnished; the nearest he ever went to it was when he bought up—very cheaply, as was his custom—a broken man's insurance policy a day after the law made such a practice illegal. There was no haggling at Festus Clasby's counter. There was only conversation, agreeable conversation about things which Festus Clasby did not sell, such as the weather, the diseases of animals, the results of races, and the scandals of the Royal Families of Europe. These conversations were not hurried or yet protracted. They came to a happy ending at much the same moment as Festus Clasby made the knot on the twine of your parcel. But to stand in the devotional lights in front of his counter,

wedged in between divisions and subdivisions of his boxes and barrels, and to scent the good scents which exhaled from his shelves, and to get served by Festus Clasby in person, was to feel that you had been indeed served.

The small farmers and herds and the hardy little dark mountainy men had this reverential feeling about the good man and his shop. They approached the establishment as holy pilgrims might approach a shrine. They stood at his counter with the air of devotees. Festus Clasby waited on them with patience and benignity. He might be some warm-blooded god handing gifts out over the counter. When he brought forth his great account book and entered up their purchases with a carpenter's pencil—having first moistened the tip of it with his flexible lips—they had strongly, deep down in their souls, the conviction that they were then and for all time debtors to Festus Clasby. Which, indeed and in truth, they were. From year's end to year's end their accounts remained in that book; in the course of their lives various figures rose and faded after their names, recording the ups and

downs of their financial histories. It was only when Festus Clasby had supplied the materials for their wakes that the great pencil, with one mighty stroke of terrible finality, ran like a sword through their names, wiping their very memories from the hillsides. All purchases were entered up in Festus Clasby's mighty record without vulgar discussions as to price. The business of the establishment was conducted on the basis of a belief in the man who sold and acquiescence in that belief on the part of the man who purchased. The customers of Festus Clasby would as soon have thought of questioning his prices as they would of questioning the right of the earth to revolve round the sun. Festus Clasby was the planet around which this constellation of small farmers, herds, and hardy little dark mountainy men revolved; from his shop they drew the light and heat and food which kept them going. Their very emotions were registered at his counter. To the man with a religious turn he was able, at a price, to hand down from his shelves the *Key of Heaven;* the other side of the box he comforted the man who came

panting to his taps to drown the memory of some chronic impertinence. He gave a very long credit, and a very long credit, in his philosophy, justified a very, very long profit. As to security, if Festus Clasby's customers had not a great deal of money they had grass which grew every year, and the beasts which Festus Clasby fattened and sold at the fairs had sometimes to eat his debtors out of his book. If his bullocks were not able to do even this, then Festus Clasby talked to the small farmer about a mortgage on the land, so that now and again small farmers became herds for Festus Clasby. In this way was he able to maintain his position with his back to the hills and his toes in the valley, striding his territory like a Colossus. When you saw his name on the signboard standing stark from the landscape, and when you saw Festus Clasby behind his counter, you knew instinctively that both had always stood for at least twenty shillings in the pound.

II

Now, it came to pass that on a certain day Festus Clasby was passing through the outskirts of the nearest country town on his homeward journey, his cart laden with provisions. At the same moment the spare figure of a tinker whose name was Mac-an-Ward, the Son of the Bard, veered around the corner of a street with a new tin can under his arm. It was the Can with the Diamond Notch.

Mac-an-Ward approached Festus Clasby, who pulled up his cart.

"Well, my good man?" queried Festus Clasby, a phrase usually addressed across his counter, his hands outspread, to long-standing customers.

"The last of a rare lot," said Mac-an-Ward, deftly poising the tin can on the top of his fingers, so that it stood level with Festus Clasby's great face. Festus Clasby took this as a business proposition, and the soul of the trader revolved within him. Why not buy the tin can from this tinker and sell it at a profit across his counter, even as he would sell the flitches of bacon

that were wrapped in sacking upon his cart? He was in mellow mood, and laid down the reins in the cart beside him.

"And so she is the last?" he said, eyeing the tin can.

"She is the Can with the Diamond Notch."

"Odds and ends go cheap," said Festus Clasby.

"She is the last, but the flower of the flock."

"Remnants must go as bargains or else remain as remnants."

"My wallet!" protested Mac-an-Ward, "you wound me. Don't speak as if I picked it off a scrap heap."

"I will not, but I will say that, being a tail end and an odd one, it must go at a sacrifice."

The Son of the Bard tapped the side of the can gently with his knuckles.

"Listen to him, the hard man from the country! He has no regard for my feelings. I had the soldering iron in my hand in face of it before the larks stirred this morning. I had my back to the East, but through the bottom of that can there I

saw the sun rise in its glory. The brightness of it is as the harvest moon."

"I don't want it for its brightness."

"Dear heart, listen to the man who would not have brightness. He would pluck the light from the moon, quench the heat in the heart of the sun. He would draw a screen across the aurora borealis and paint out the rainbow with lamp black. He might do such things, but he cannot deny the brightness of this can. Look upon it! When the world is coming to an end it will shine up at the sky and it will say: 'Ah, where are all the great stars now that made a boast of their brightness?' And there will be no star left to answer. They will all be dead things in the heaven, buried in the forgotten graves of the skies."

"Don't mind the skies. Let me see if there may not be a leakage in it." Festus Clasby held up the can between his handsome face and the bright sky.

"Leakages!" exclaimed Mac-an-Ward. "A leakage in a can that I soldered as if with my own heart's blood. Holy Kilcock, what a mind has this man from the country! He sees no value in its

brightness; now he will tell me that there is no virtue in its music."

"I like music," said Festus Clasby. "No fiddler has ever stood at my door but had the good word to say of me. Not one of them could ever say that he went thirsty from my counter."

Said the Son of the Bard: "Fiddlers, what are fiddlers? What sound have they like the music of the sweet milk going into that can from the yellow teats of the red cow? Morning and evening there will be a hymn played upon it in the haggard. Was not the finest song ever made called *Cailin deas crúidhte na mbo?* Music! Do you think that the water in the holy well will not improve in its sparkle to have such a can as this dipped into it? It will be welcome everywhere for its clearness and its cleanness. Heavenly Father, look at the manner in which I rounded the edge of that can with the clippers! Cut clean and clever, soldered at the dawn of day, the dew falling upon the hands that moulded it, the parings scattered about my feet like jewels. And now you would bargain over it. I will not sell it to you at all. I will put it in a holy shrine."

Festus Clasby turned the can over in his hands, a little bewildered. "It looks an ordinary can enough," he said.

"It is the Can with the Diamond Notch," declared Mac-an-Ward.

"Would it be worth a shilling now?"

"He puts a price upon it! It is blasphemy. The man has no religion; he will lose his soul. The devils will have him by the heels. They will tear his red soul through the roof. Give me the can; don't hold it in those hands any longer. They are coarse; the hair is standing about the purple knuckles like stubbles in an ill-cut meadow. That can was made for the hands of a delicate woman or for the angels that carry water to the Court of Heaven. I saw it in a vision the night before I made it; it was on the head of a maiden with golden hair. Her feet were bare and like shells. She walked across a field where daisies rose out of young grass; she had the can resting on her head like one coming from the milking. So I rose up then and said, 'Now, I will make a can fit for this maiden's head.' And I made it out of the rising sun and the falling

dew. And now you ask me if it is worth a shilling."

"For all your talk, it is only made of tin, and not such good tin."

"Not good tin! I held it in my hand in the piece before ever the clippers was laid upon it. I bent it and it curved, supple as a young snake. I shook it, and the ripples ran down the length of it like silver waves in a little lake. The strength of the ages was in its voice. It has gathered its power in the womb of the earth. It was smelted from the precious metal taken from the mines of the Peninsula of Malacca, and it will have its gleam when the sparkle of the diamond is spent."

"I'll give you a shilling for it, and hold your tongue."

"No! I will not have it on my conscience. God is my judge, I will break it up first. I will cut it into pieces. From one of them will yet be made a breastplate, and in time to come it will be nailed to your own coffin, with your name and your age and the date of your death painted upon it. And when the paint is faded upon it it will shine over the dust of the

bone of your breast. It will be dug up and preserved when all graveyards are abolished. They will say, 'We will keep this breastplate, for who knows but that it bore the name of the man who refused to buy the Can with the Diamond Notch.'"

"How much will you take for it?"

"Now you are respectful. Let me put a price upon it, for it was I who fashioned it into this shape. It will hold three gallons and a half from now until the time that swallows wear shoes. But for all that I will part with it, because I am poor and hungry and have a delicate wife. It breaks my heart to say it, but pay into my hands two shillings and it is yours. Pay quickly or I may repent. It galls me to part with it; in your charity pay quickly and begone."

"I will not. I will give you one-and-six."

"Assassin! You stab me. What a mind you have! Look at the greed of your eyes; they would devour the grass of the fields from this place up to the Devil's Bit. You would lock up the air and sell it in gasping breaths. You are disgusting.

But give me the one-and-six and to Connacht with you! I am damning my soul standing beside you and your cart, smelling its contents. How can a man talk with the smell of fat bacon going between him and the wind? One-and-six and the dew that fell at the making hardly dry upon my hands yet. Farewell, a long farewell, my Shining One; we may never meet again."

The shawl of Mac-an-Ward's wife had been blowing around the near-by corner while this discussion had been in progress. It flapped against the wall in the wind like a loose sail in the rigging. The head of the woman herself came gradually into view, one eye spying around the masonry, half-closing as it measured the comfortable proportions of Festus Clasby seated upon his cart. As the one-and-six was counted out penny by penny into the palm of the brown hand of the Son of the Bard, the figure of his wife floated out on the open road, tossing and tacking and undecided in its direction to the eye of those who understood not the language of gestures and motions. By a series of giddy

evolutions she arrived at the cart as the last of the coppers was counted out.

"I have parted with my inheritance," said Mac-an-Ward. "I have sold my soul and the angels have folded their wings, weeping."

"In other words, I have bought a tin can," said Festus Clasby, and his frame and the entire cart shook with his chuckling.

The tinker's wife chuckled with him in harmony. Then she reached out her hand with a gesture that claimed a sympathetic examination of the purchase. Festus Clasby hesitated, looking into the eyes of the woman. Was she to be trusted? Her eyes were clear, grey, and open, almost babyish in their rounded innocence. Festus Clasby handed her the tin can, and she examined it slowly.

"Who sold you the Can with the Diamond Notch?" she asked.

"The man standing by your side."

"He has wronged you. The can is not his."

"He says he made it."

"Liar! He never curved it in the piece."

"I don't much care whether he did or not. It is mine now, anyhow."

"It is my brother's can. No other hand made it. Look! Do you see this notch on the piece of sheet iron where the handle is fastened to the sides?"

"I do."

"Is it not shaped like a diamond?"

"It is."

"By that mark I identify it. My brother cuts that diamond-shaped notch in all the work he puts out from his hands. It is his private mark. The shopkeepers have knowledge of it. There is a value on the cans with that notch shaped like a diamond. This man here makes cans when he is not drunk, but the notch to them is square. The shopkeepers have knowledge of them, too, for they do not last. The handles fall out of them. He has never given his time to the art, and so does not know how to rivet them."

"She vilifies me," said Mac-an-Ward, *sotto voce*.

"Then I am glad he has not sold me one of his own," said Festus Clasby. "I have a fancy for the lasting article."

"You may be able to buy it yet," said

the woman. "My brother is lying sick of the fever, and I have his right to sell the Cans with the Diamond Notch on the handles where they are riveted."

"But I have bought it already."

"This man," said the damsel, in a tone which discounted the husband, "had no right to sell it. If it is not his property, but the property of my brother, won't you say that he nor no other man has a right to sell it?"

Festus Clasby felt puzzled. He was unaccustomed to dealing with people who raised questions of title. His black brows knit.

"How can a man who doesn't own a thing sell a thing?" she persisted. "Is it a habit of yours to sell that which you do not own?"

"It is not," Festus Clasby said, feeling that an assault had been wantonly made on his integrity as a trader. "No one could ever say that of me. Honest value was ever my motto."

"And the motto of my brother who is sick with the fever. I will go to him and say, 'I met the most respectable-looking man in all Europe, who put a value on

your can because of the diamond notch.' I will pay into his hands the one-and-six which is its price."

Festus Clasby had, when taken out of his own peculiar province, a heavy mind, and the type of mind that will range along side-issues and get lost in them if they are raised often enough and long enough. The diamond notch on the handle, the brother who was sick of the fever, the alleged non-title of Mac-an-Ward, the interposition of the woman, the cans with the handles which fall out, and the cans with the handles which do not fall out, the equity of selling that which does not belong to you—all these things chased each other across Festus Clasby's mind. The Son of the Bard stood silent by the cart, looking away down the road with a pensive look on his long, narrow face.

"Pay me the one-and-six to put into the hands of my brother," the woman said.

Festus Clasby's mind was brought back at once to his pocket. "No," he said, "but this man can give you my money to pay into the hand of your brother."

"This man," she said airily, "has no interest for me. Whatever took place

between the two of you in regard to my brother's can I will have nothing to say to."

"Then if you won't," said Festus Clasby, "I will have nothing to do with you. If he had no right to the can you can put the police on to him; that's what police are for."

"And upon you," the woman added. "The police are also for that."

"Upon me?" Festus Clasby exclaimed, his chest swelling. "My name has never crossed the mind of a policeman, except, maybe, for what he might owe me at the end of the month for pigs' heads. I never stood in the shadow of the law. And to this man standing by your side I have nothing to say."

"You have. You bought from him that which did not belong to him. You received, and the receiver is as bad as the rogue. So the law has it. The shadow of the law is great."

Festus Clasby came down from his cart, his face troubled. "I am not used to this," he said.

"You are a handsome man, a man thought well of. You have great

provisions upon your cart. This man has nothing but the unwashed shirt which hangs on his slack back. It will not become you to march handcuffed with his like, going between two policemen to the bridewell."

"What are you saying of me, woman?"

"It will be no token of business to see your cart and the provisions it contains driven into the yard of the barracks. All the people of this town will see it, for they have many eyes. The people of trade will be coming to their doors, speaking of it. 'A man's property was molested,' they will say. 'What property?' will be asked. 'The Can with the Diamond Notch,' they will answer; 'the man of substance conspired with the thief to make away with it.' These are the words that will be spoken in the streets."

Festus Clasby set great store on his name, the name he had got painted for the eye of the country over his door.

"I will be known to the police as one extensive in my dealings," he said. "They will not couple me with this man who is known as one living outside of the law."

"It is not for the Peelers to put the honest man on one side and the thief on the other. That will be for the court. You will stand with him upon my charge. The Peelers will say to you, 'We know you to be a man of great worth, and the law will uphold you.' But the law is slow, and a man's good name goes fast."

Festus Clasby fingered his money in his pocket, and the touch of it made him struggle. "The can may be this man's for all I know. You have no brother, and I believe you to be a fraud."

"That, too, will be for the law to decide. If I have a brother, the law will produce him when his fever is ended. If I have no brother the law will so declare it. If my brother makes a Can with the Diamond Notch, the law will hear of its value. If my brother does not make a Can with the Diamond Notch you will know me as one deficient in truth. There is no point under the stars that the law cannot be got to declare upon. But as is right, the law is slow, and will wait for a man to come out of his fever. Before it can decide, another man's good name, like a little cloud riding across the sky, is gone

from the memory of the people and will not come riding back upon the crest of any wind."

"It will be a great price to be paying for a tin can," said Festus Clasby. He was turning around with his fingers the coins in his pocket.

The woman put the can on her arm, then covered it up with her shawl, like a hen taking a chick under the protection of her wing.

"I have given you many words," she said, "because you are a man sizeable and good to the eye of a foolish woman. If I had not a sick brother I might be induced to let slip his right in the Can with the Diamond Notch for the pleasure I have found in the look of your face. When I saw you on the cart I said, 'There is the build of a man which is to my fancy.' When I heard your voice I said, 'That is good music to the ear of a woman.' When I saw your eye I said, 'There is danger to the heart of a woman.' When I saw your beard I said, 'There is a great growth from the strength of a man.' When you spoke to me and gave me your laugh I said, 'Ah, what a place that would be for a woman

to be seated, driving the roads of the country on a cart laden with provisions beside one so much to the female liking.' But my sick brother waits, and now I go to do that which may make away with the goodness of your name. I must seek those who will throw the shadow of the law over many."

She moved away, sighing a quick sigh, as one might who was setting out on a disagreeable mission. Festus Clasby called to her and she came back, her eyes pained as they sought his face. Festus Clasby paid the money, a bright shilling and two threepenny bits, into her hand, wondering vaguely, but virtuously, as he did so, what hardy little dark mountainy man he would later charge up the can to at the double price.

"Now," said the wife of Mac-an-Ward, putting the money away, "you have paid me for my brother's can and you would be within your right in getting back your one-and-six from this bad man." She hitched her shawl contemptuously in the direction of Mac-an-Ward.

Festus Clasby looked at the Son of the Bard with his velvety soft eyes. "Come,

sir," said he, his tone a little nervous. "My money!"

Mac-an-Ward hitched his trousers at the hips like a sailor, spat through his teeth, and eyed Festus Clasby through a slit in his half-closed eyes. There was a little patter of the feet on the road on the part of Mac-an-Ward, and Festus Clasby knew enough of the world and its ways to gather that these were scientific movements invented to throw a man in a struggle. He did not like the look of the Son of the Bard.

"I will go home and leave him to God," he said. "Hand me the can and I will be shortening my road."

At this moment three small boys, ragged, eager, their faces hard and weather-beaten, bounded up to the cart. They were breathless as they stood about the woman.

"Mother!" they cried in chorus. "The man in the big shop! He is looking for a can."

"What can?" cried the woman.

The three young voices rose like a great cry: "The Can with the Diamond Notch."

The woman caught her face in her hands

as if some terrible thing had been said. She stared at the youngsters intently.

"He wants one more to make up an order," they chanted. "He says he will pay——"

The woman shrank from them with a cry. "How much?" she asked.

"Half-a-crown!"

The wife of Mac-an-Ward threw out her arms in a wild gesture of despair. "My God!" she cried. "I sold it. I wronged my sick brother."

"Where did you sell it, mother?"

"Here, to this handsome dark man."

"How much did he pay?"

"Eighteen-pence."

The three youngsters raised their hard faces to the sky and raised a long howl, like beagles who had lost their quarry.

Suddenly the woman's face brightened. She looked eagerly at Festus Clasby, then laid the hand of friendship, of appeal, on his arm.

"I have it!" she cried, joyfully.

"Have what?" asked Festus Clasby.

"A way out of the trouble," she said. "A means of saving my brother from

wrong. A way of bringing him his own for the Can with the Diamond Notch."

"What way might that be?" asked Festus Clasby, his manner growing sceptical.

"I will go to the shopman with it and get the half-crown. Having got the half-crown I will hurry back here—or you can come with me—and I will pay you back your one-and-six. In that way I will make another shilling and do you no wrong. Is that agreed?"

"It is not agreed," said Festus Clasby. "Give me out the tin can. I am done with you now."

"It's robbery!" cried the woman, her eyes full of a blazing sudden anger.

"What is robbery?" asked Festus Clasby.

"Doing me out of a shilling. Wronging my sick brother out of his earnings. A man worth hundreds, maybe thousands, to stand between a poor woman and a shilling. I am deceived in you."

"Out with the can," said Festus Clasby.

"Let the woman earn her shilling," said Mac-an-Ward. His voice came from behind Festus Clasby.

"Our mother must get her shilling," cried the three youngsters.

Festus Clasby turned about to Mac-an-Ward, and as he did so he noticed that two men had come and set their backs against a wall hard by; they leaned limply, casually, against it, but they were, he noticed, of the same tribe as the Mac-an-Wards.

"It was always lucky, the Can with the Diamond Notch," said the woman. "This offer of the man in the big shop is a sign of it. I will not allow you to break my brother's luck and he lying in his fever."

"By heaven!" cried Festus Clasby. "I will have you all arrested. I will have the law of you now."

He wheeled about the horse and cart, setting his face for the police barrack, which could be seen shining in the distance in the plumage of a magpie. The two men who stood by came over, and from the other side another man and three old women. With Mac-an-Ward, Mrs. Mac-an-Ward, and the three young Mac-an-Wards, they grouped themselves around Festus Clasby, and he was vaguely

conscious that they were grouped with some military art. A low murmur of a dispute arose among them, rising steadily. He could only hear snatches of their words: 'Give it back to him,' 'He won't get it,' 'How can he be travelling without the Can with the Diamond Notch?' 'Is it the Can with the Diamond Notch?' 'No,' 'Maybe it is, maybe it is not,' 'Who knows that?' 'I say yes,' 'Hold your tongue,' 'Be off, you slut,' 'Rattle away.'

People from the town were attracted to the place. Festus Clasby, the dispute stirring something in his own blood, shook his fist in the long narrow face of Mac-an-Ward. As he did so he got a tip on the heels and a pressure upon the chest sent him staggering a few steps back. One of the old women held him up in her arms and another old woman stood before him, striking her breast. Festus Clasby saw the wisps of hair hanging about the bony face and froth at the corners of her mouth. Vaguely he saw the working of the bones of her wasted neck, and below it a long V-shaped gleam of the yellow tanned breast, which she thumped with her fist. Afterwards the memory of this ugly

old trollop remained with him. The youngsters were shooting in and out through the group, sending up unearthly shrieks. Two of the men peeled off their coats and were sparring at each other wickedly, shouting all the time, while Mac-an-Ward was making a tumultuous peace. The commotion and the strife, or the illusion of strife, increased. "Oh," an onlooker cried, "the tinkers are murdering each other!"

The patient horse at last raised its head with a toss and a snort over the rabble, and then wheeled about to break away. With the instinct of his kind, Festus Clasby rushed to the animal's head and held him. As he did so the striped petticoats and the tossing shawls of the women flashed about the shafts and the body of the cart. The men raised a hoarse roar.

A neighbour of Festus Clasby, driving up the street at this moment, was amazed to see the great man of lands and shops in the midst of the wrangling tinkers. He pulled up, marvelling, then went to him.

"What is this, Festus?" he asked.

"They have robbed me," cried Festus Clasby.

"Robbed you?"

"Ay, of money and of property."

"Good God! How much money?"

"I don't rightly know—I forget—some shillings, maybe."

"Oh! And of property?"

"No matter. It is only one article, but property."

"Come home, Festus; in the name of God get out of this," advised the good neighbour.

But Festus Clasby was strangely moved. He was behaving like a man who had drink taken. Something had happened wounding to his soul. "I will not go," he cried. "I must have back my money."

The tinkers had now ceased disputing among themselves. They were grouped about the two men as if they were only spectators of an interesting dispute.

"Back I must have my money!" cried Festus Clasby, his great hand going up in a mighty threat. The tinkers clicked their tongues on the roofs of their mouths in a sound of amazement, as much as to say, "What a terrible thing! What a wonderful and a mighty man!"

"I advise you to come," persuaded his neighbour.

"Never! God is my judge, never!" cried Festus Clasby.

Again the tinkers clicked their tongues, looked at each other in wonder.

"You will be thankful you brought your life out of this," said the neighbour. "Let it not be said of you on the countryside that you were seen wrangling with the tinkers in this town."

"Shame! Shame! Shame!" broke out like a shocked murmur among the attentive tinkers.

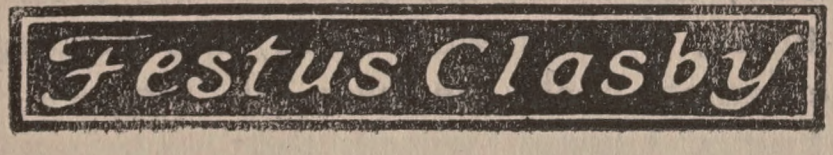
Festus Clasby faced his audience in all his splendid proportions. Never was he seen so moved. Never had such a great passion seized him. The soft tones of his eyes were no longer soft. They shone in fiery wroth. "I will at least have that which I bought twice over!" he cried. "I will have my tin can!"

Immediately the group of tinkers broke up in the greatest disorder. Hoarse cries broke out among them. They behaved like people upon whom some fearful doom had been suddenly pronounced. The old women threw themselves about, racked

with pain and terror. They beat their hands together, threw wild arms in despairing gestures to the sky, raising a harrowing lamentation. The men growled in sullen gutturals. The youngsters knelt on the road, giving out the wild beagle-like howl. Voices cried above the uproar: "Where is it? Where is the Can with the Diamond Notch? Get him the Can with the Diamond Notch! He must have the can with the Diamond Notch! How can he travel without the Can with the Diamond Notch? He'll die without the Can with the Diamond Notch!"

Festus Clasby was endeavouring to deliver his soul of impassioned protests when his neighbour, assisted by a bystander or two, forcibly hoisted him up on his cart and he was driven away amid a great howling from the tinkers.

It was twilight when he reached his place among the hills, and the good white letters under the thatch



showed clear to his eyes. Pulling himself together he drove with an air about the gable and into the wide open yard at the back, fowls clearing out of his way, a sheep-dog coming to welcome him, a calf mewing mournfully over the half-door of a stable. Festus Clasby was soothed by this homely, this worshipful, environment, and got off the cart with a sigh. Inside the kitchen he could hear the faithful women trotting about preparing the great master's meal. He made ready to carry the provisions into the shop. When he unwrapped the sacking from the bacon, something like a sudden stab went through his breast. Perspiration came out on his forehead. Several large long slices had been cut off in jagged slashes from the flitches. They lay like wounded things on the body of the cart. He pulled down the other purchases feverishly, horror in his face. How many loaves had been torn off his batch of bread? Where were all the packets of tea and sugar, the currants and raisins, the flour, the tobacco, the cream-of-tartar, the caraway seeds, the nutmeg, the lemon peel, the hair oil, the——

Festus Clasby wiped the perspiration

from his forehead. He stumbled out of the yard, sat up on a ditch, and looked across the silent, peaceful, innocent country. How good it was! How lovely were the beasts grazing, fattening, in the fields! His soft velvety eyes were suddenly flooded with a bitter emotion and he wept.

The loaves of bread were under the shawl of the woman who had supported Festus Clasby when he stumbled; the bacon was under another bright shawl; the tobacco and flour fell to the lot of her whose yellow breast showed the play of much sun and many winds; the tea and sugar and the nutmeg and caraway seeds were under the wing of the wife of the Son of the Bard in the Can with the Diamond Notch.

BOTH SIDES OF THE POND

I

MRS. DONOHOE marked the clearness of the sky, the number and brightness of the stars.

"There will be a share of frost to-night, Denis," she said.

Denis Donohoe, her son, adjusted a primitive bolt on the stable door, then sniffed at the air, his broad nostrils quivering sensitively as he raised his head.

"There is ice in the wind," he said.

"Make a start with the turf to the market to-morrow," his mother advised. "People in town will be wanting fires now."

Denis Donohoe walked over to the dim stack of brown turf piled at the back of the stable. It was there since the early fall, the dry earth cut from the bog, the turf that would make bright and pleasant fires in the open grates of Connacht for the winter months. Away from it spread

the level bogland, a sweep of country that had, they said, in the infancy of the earth been a great oak forest, across which in later times had roved packs of hungry wolves, and which could at this day claim the most primitive form of industry in Western Europe. Out into this bogland in the summer had come from their cabins the peasantry, men and women, Denis Donohoe among them; they had dug up slices of the spongy, wet sod, cut it into pieces rather larger than bricks, licked it into shape by stamping upon it with their bare feet, stacked it about in little rows to dry in the sun, one sod leaning against the other, looking in the moonlight like a great host of wee brown fairies grouped in couples for a midnight dance on the carpet of purple heather. Now the time had come to convert it into such money as it would fetch.

Denis Donohoe whistled merrily that night as he piled the donkey cart, or "creel," with the sods of turf. Long before daybreak next morning he was about, his movements quick like one who had great business on hands. The kitchen of the cabin was illuminated by

a rushlight, the rays of which did not go much beyond a small deal table, scrubbed white, where he sat at his breakfast, an unusually good repast, for he had tea, home-made bread and a boiled egg. His mother moved about the dim kitchen, waiting on him, her bare feet almost noiseless on the black earthen floor. He ate heartily and silently, making the Sign of the Cross when he had finished. His mother followed him out on the dark road to bid him good luck, standing beside the creel of turf.

"There should be a brisk demand now that the winter is upon us," she said hopefully. "God be with you."

"God and Mary be with you, mother," Denis Donohoe made answer as he took the donkey by the head and led him along the dark road. The little animal drew his burden very slowly, the cart creaking and rocking noisily over the uneven road. Now and then Denis Donohoe spoke to him encouragingly, softly, his gaze at the same time going to the east, searching the blank sky for a hint of the dawn to come.

But they had gone rocking and swaying along the winding road for a long time

before the day dawned. Denis Donohoe marked the spread of the light, the slow looming up of a range of hills, the sweep of brown patches of bog, then grey and green fields, broken by the glimmer of blue lakes, slopes of brown furze making for them a dull frame.

"Now that we have the blessed light we won't feel the journey at all," Denis Donohoe said to the donkey.

The ass drew the creel of turf more briskly, shook his winkers and swished his tail. When they struck very sharp hills Denis Donohoe got to the back of the cart, put his hands to the shafts, and, lowering his head, helped to push up the load, the muscles springing taut at the back of his thick limbs as he pressed hard against the bright frosty ground.

As they came down from the hills he already felt very hungry, his fingers tenderly fondling the slices of oaten bread he had put away in the pocket of his grey homespun coat. But he checked the impulse to eat, the long jaw of his swarthy face set, his strong teeth tight together awaiting the right hour to play their eager part. If he ate all the oaten bread now—

splendid, dry, hard stuff, made of oat meal and water, baked on a gridiron—it would leave too long a fast afterwards. Denis Donohoe had been brought up to practise caution in these matters, to subject his stomach to a rigorous discipline, for life on the verge of a bog is an exacting business. Instead of obeying the impulse to eat Denis Donohoe blew warm breaths into his purple hands, beat his arms about his body to deaden the bitter cold, whistled, took some steps of an odd dance along the road, and went on talking to the donkey as if he were making pleasant conversation to a companion. The only sign of life to be seen on earth or air was a thin line of wild duck high up in the sky, one group making wide circles over a vivid mountain lake.

Half way on his journey to the country town Denis Donohoe pulled up his little establishment. It was outside a lonely cottage exactly like his own home. There was the same brown thatch on the roof, a garland of verdant wild creepers drooping from a spot at the gable, the same two small windows without any sashes in the front wall, the same narrow rutty pathway

from the road, the same sort of yellow hen cackling heatedly, her legs quivering as she clutched the drab half door, the same scent of decayed cabbage leaves in the air. Denis Donohoe took a sack of hay from the top of the creel of turf, and spread some of it on the side of the road for the donkey. While he did so a woman who wore a white cap, a grey bodice, a thick woollen red petticoat, under which her bare lean legs showed, came to the door, waving the yellow hen off her perch.

"Good day to you, Mrs. Deely," Denis Donohoe said, showing his strong teeth.

"Welcome, Denis. Won't you step in and warm yourself at the fire, for the day is sharp, and you are early on the road?"

Denis Donohoe sat with the woman by the fire for some time, their exchange of family gossip quiet and agreeable. The young man was, however, uneasy, glancing about the house now and then like one who missed something. The woman, dropping her calm eyes on him, divined his thoughts.

"Agnes is not about," she said. "She started off for the Cappa Post Office an hour gone, for we had tidings that a letter is there for us from Sydney."

"A letter from her sister?"

"Yes, Mary is married there and doing well."

Denis Donohoe resumed his journey.

At the appointed spot he ravenously devoured the oaten bread, then stretched himself on his stomach on the ground and took some draughts of water from a roadside stream, drawing it up with a slow sucking noise, his teeth chattering, his eyes on the bright pebbles that glittered between some green cress at the bottom. When he had finished the donkey also laved his thirst at the spot.

He reached the market town while it was yet morning. He led the creel of turf through the straggling streets, where some people with the sleep in their eyes were moving about. The only sound he made was a low word of encouragement to the donkey.

"How much for the creel?" a man asked, standing at his shop door.

"Six shilling," Denis Donohoe replied, and waited, for it was above the business of a decent turf-seller to praise his wares or press for a sale.

"Good luck to you, son," said the mer-

chant, "I hope you'll get it." He smiled, folded his hands one over the other, and retired to his shop.

Denis Donohoe moved on, saying in an undertone to the donkey, "Gee-up, Patsy. That old fellow is no good."

There were other inquiries, but nobody purchased. They said that money was very scarce. Denis Donohoe said nothing; money was too remote a thing for him to imagine how it could be ever anything else except scarce. He grew tired of going up and down past shops where there was no sign of business, so he drew the side streets and laneways, places where children screamed about the road, where there was a scent of soapy water, where women came to their doors and looked at him with eyes that expressed a slow resentment, their arms bare above the elbows, their hair hanging dankly about their ears, their voices, when they spoke, monotonous, and always sounding a note of tired complaint.

On the rise of a little bridge Denis Donohoe met a red-haired woman, a family of children skirmishing about her; there

was a battle light in her wolfish eyes, her idle hands were folded over her stomach.

"How much, gossoon?" she asked.

"Six shilling."

"Six devils!" She walked over to the creel, handling some of the sods of turf. Denis Donohoe knew she was searching a constitutionally abusive mind for some word contemptuous of his wares. She found it at last, for she smacked her lips. It was in the Gaelic. "*Spairteach*!" she cried—a word that was eloquent of bad turf, stuff dug from the first layer of the bog, a mere covering for the correct vein beneath it.

"It's good stone turf," Denis Donohoe protested, a little nettled.

The woman was joined by some people who were hanging about, anxious to take part in bargaining which involved no personal liability. They argued, made jokes, shouted, and finally began to bully Denis Donohoe, the woman leading, her voice half a scream, her stomach heaving, her eyes dancing with excitement, a yellow froth gathering at the corners of her angry mouth, her hand gripping a sod of the turf, for the only dissipation life now

offered her was this haggling with and shouting down of turf sellers. Denis Donohoe stood immovable beside his cart, patient as his donkey, his swarthy face stolid under the shadow of his broad-brimmed black hat, his intelligent eyes quietly measuring his noisy antagonists. When the woman's anger had quite spent itself the turf was purchased for five shillings.

Denis Donohoe carried the sods in his arms to the kitchen of the purchaser's house. It entailed a great many journeys in and out, the sods being piled up on his hooked left arm with a certain skill. His route lay through a small shop, down a semi-dark hallway, across a kitchen, the sods being stowed under a stairway where cockroaches scampered from the thudding of the falling sods.

Women were moving about the kitchen, talking incessantly, fumbling about tables, always appearing to search for something that had been lost, one crooning over a cradle that she rocked before the fire. The smell of cooking, the sound of something fatty hissing on a pan, brought a sense of

faintness to Denis Donohoe, for he was ravenously hungry again.

He stumbled awkwardly in and out of the place with his armfuls of brown sods. The women moved with reluctance out of his way. Once a servant girl raised the most melancholy pair of wide brown eyes he had ever seen, saying to him, "It always goes through me to hear the turf falling in the stair-hole. It reminds me of the day I heard the clay falling on me father's coffin, God be with him and forgive him, for he died in the horrors."

By the time Denis Donohoe had delivered the cartload of turf the little donkey had eaten all the hay in the sack. In the small shop Denis purchased some bacon, flour and tea, so that he had only some coppers to bring home with him. After some hesitation he handed back one penny for some biscuits, and these he ate as soon as he set out on the return journey.

The little donkey went over the road through the hills on the way back with spirit, for donkeys are good homers. Denis Donohoe sat up on the front of the cart, his legs dangling down beside the shaft. The donkey trotted down the slopes gayly,

the harness rattling, the cart swaying, jolting, making an amazing noise.

The donkey cocked his ears, flecked his tail, even indulged in one or two buck-jumps, as he rattled down the hilly roads. Denis Donohoe once or twice leaned out over the shaft, and brought his open hand down on the haunch of the donkey, but it was more a caress than a whack.

The light began to fade, the landscape to grow more obscure. Suddenly Denis Donohoe broke into song. They were going over a level stretch of ground. The donkey walked quietly. The quivering voice rang out over the darkening landscape, gaining in quality and in steadiness, a clear light voice, the notes coming with the instinctive intonation, the perfect order of the born folk singer. It was some old Gaelic song, a refrain that had been preserved like the trunks of the primeval oaks in the bogs, such a refrain as might claim kinship with the Dresden *Amen,* sung by generations of German peasants until at last it reached the ears of Richard Wagner, giving birth to a classic. As he sang Denis Donohoe raised his swarthy face, his profile sharp against

the pale sky, his eyes, half in rapture like all folk singers, ranging over the hills, his long throat palpitating, swelling and slackening like the throat of a bird quivering in song. Then a light from the sashless windows of Mrs. Deely's cabin shone faintly and silence again brooded over the place. When he reached the cabin Denis Donohoe dismounted and walked into the kitchen, his eyes bright, his steps so eager that he became conscious of it and pulled up at once.

Mrs. Deely was sitting by the fire, her knitting needles busy. Denis Donohoe sat down beside her. While they were speaking a young girl came from the only room in the house, and, crossing the kitchen, stood beside the open fireplace.

"Agnes had great news from Australia from Mary," Mrs. Deely said. "She enclosed the price of the passage from this place to Sydney."

"I will be making the voyage the end of this month," the girl herself added.

There was an awkward silence, during which Mrs. Deely carefully piloted one of her needles through an intricate turn in the heel of the sock.

"Well, I wish you luck, Agnes," Denis Donohoe said at last, and then gave a queer odd little laugh, a little laugh that made Mrs. Deely regard him quickly and seriously. She noticed that he had his eyes fixed on the ground.

"It will be a great change from this place," the girl said, fingering something on the mantelpiece. "Mary says Sydney is a wonderful big city."

Denis Donohoe slowly lifted his eyes, taking in the shape of the girl from the bare feet to the bright ribbon that was tied in her hair. What he saw was a slim girl, her limbs showing faintly in the folds of a cheap, thin skirt, a loose, small shawl resting on the shoulders, her bosom heaving gently where the shawl did not meet, her profile delicate and faint in the light of the fire, her eyes, suddenly turned upon him, being the eyes of a girl conscious of his eyes, her low breath the sweet breath of a girl stepping into her womanhood.

"Well, God prosper you, Agnes Deely," Denis Donohoe said after some time, and rose from his seat.

The two women came out on the road to see him off. He did not dally, but

jumped on to the front of the cart and rattled away.

Overhead the sky was winter clear, the stars merry, eternal, the whole heaven brilliant in its silent, stupendous song, its perpetual *Magnificat;* but Denis Donohoe made the rest of the journey in a black silence, gloom in the rigid figure, the stooping shoulders, the dangling legs; and the hills seemed to draw their grim shadows around his tragic ride to the lonely light in his mother's cabin on the verge of the dead brown bog.

II

There was a continuous clatter of conversation that rose and fell and broke like the waves on the beach; there was the dull shuffling of uneasy feet on the ground, the tinkling of glasses, the rattle of bottles, and over it all the half hysterical laugh of a tipsy woman. Above the racket a penetrating, quivering voice was raised in song.

Now and again bleary eyes were raised to the stage, shadowy in a fog of tobacco smoke. The figure on the boards strutted about, made some fantastic steps, the face

pallid in the streaky light, the mouth scarlet as a tulip for a moment as it opened wide, the muscles about the lips wiry and distinct from much practice, the words of the song coming in a vehement nasal falsetto and in a brogue acquired in the Bowery. The white face of the man who accompanied the singer on the piano was raised for a moment in a tired gesture that was also a protest; in the eyes of the singer as they met those of the accompanist was an expression of cynical Celtic humour; in the smouldering gaze of the pianist was the patient, stubborn soul of the Slav. The look between these entertainers, one from Connacht the other from Poland, was a little act of mutual commiseration and a mutual expression of contempt for the noisy descendants of the Lost Tribes who made merry in the place.

A Cockney who had exchanged Houndsditch for the Bowery leered up broadly at the Celt prancing about the stage. He turned to the companion who sat drinking with him, a tall, bony half-caste, her black eyes dancing in a head that quivered from an ague acquired in Illinois.

"'E's all ryght, is Paddy," said the

voice from Houndsditch. He pointed a thumb that was a certificate of villainy in the direction of the stage.

"Sure," said the coloured lady, whose ancestry rambled back away Alabama. She looked up at the stage with her bold eyes.

"I know him," she said, thoughtfully. "And I like him," she added grinning. "We all like him. He's one of the boys."

"Wot price me?" said the Houndsditch man.

"Oh, you're good, too," said the coloured lady. "Blow in another cocktail, honey." She struck her breast where the uneasy bone showed through the dusky skin. "I've a fearful thirst right there."

Little puckers gathered about the small, humorous eyes of the Cockney as he looked at her. "My," he said, "you 'ave got a thirst and a capacity, Ole Sahara!"

The coloured lady raised the cocktail to her fat lips, and as she did so there was a sudden racket, men shouting, women clapping their hands, the voice of the tipsy woman dominant in its hysteria over the uproar. The singer was bowing profuse acknowledgments from the stage, his eyes,

sly in their cynical humour, upon the face of the Slav at the piano, his head thrown back, the pallor of his face ghastly.

The lady from Alabama joined in the tribute to the singer.

"'Core, 'core," cried Ole Sahara, raising her glass in the dim vapour. "Here's to Denis Donohoe!"

THE WHITE GOAT

I

THE white goat stood in a little clearing closed in by a ring of whins on the hillside. Her head swayed from side to side like the slow motion of the pendulum of a great clock. The legs were a little spread, the knees bent, the sides slack, the snout grey and dry, the udder limp.

The Herd knew the white goat was in great agony. She had refused the share of bran he had brought her, had turned away from the armful of fresh ivy leaves his little daughter held out to her. He had desisted from the milking, she had moaned so continuously.

Some days before the Herd had found the animal injured on the hill; the previous night he had heard the labourers making a noise, shouting and singing, as they crossed from the tillage fields. He knew what had happened when he had

seen the marks of their hob-nailed boots on her body. She was always a sensitive brute, of a breed that came from the lowlands. The sombre eyes of the Herd glowed in a smouldering passion as he stood helplessly by while the white goat swung her head from side to side.

He gathered some dry bracken and spread a bed of it near the white goat. It would be unkind to allow her to lie on the wet grass when the time came that she could no longer stand. He looked up at the sky and marked the direction of the wind. It had gone round to the west. Clouds were beginning to move across the sky. There was a vivid light behind the mountains. The air was still. It would rain in the night. He had thought for the white goat standing there in the darkness, swaying her head in agony, the bracken growing sodden at her feet, the rain beating into her eyes. It was a cold place and wind-swept. Whenever the white goat had broken her tether she had flown from it to the lowlands. He remembered how, while leading her across a field once, she had drawn back in some terror when they had come to a pool of water.

The Herd looked at his little daughter. The child had drawn some distance away, the ivy leaves fallen from her bare arms. He was conscious that some fear had made her eyes round and bright. What was it that the child feared? He guessed, and marvelled that a child should understand the strange thing that was about to happen up there on the hill. The knowledge of Death was shining instinctively in the child's eyes. She was part of the stillness and greyness that was creeping over the hillside.

"We will take the white goat to the shelter of the stable," the Herd said.

The child nodded, the fear still lingering in her eyes. He untied the tether and laid his hand on the horn of the goat. She answered to the touch, walking patiently but unsteadily beside him.

After a while the child followed, taking the other horn, gently, like her father, for she had all his understanding of and nearness to the dumb animals of the fields. They came slowly and silently. The light failed rapidly as they came down the hill. Everything was merged in a shadowy vagueness, the colour of the white goat

between the two dim figures alone proclaiming itself. A kid bleated somewhere in the distance. It was the cry of a young thing for its suckle, and the Herd saw that for a moment the white goat raised her head, the instinct of her nature moving her. Then she tottered down the hill in the darkness.

When they reached the front of the stable the white goat backed painfully from the place. The Herd was puzzled for a moment. Then he saw the little pool of water in a faint glimmer before their feet. He brought the animal to one side, avoiding it, and she followed the pressure of his directing hand.

He took down a lantern that swung from the rafters of the stable and lighted it. In a corner he made a bed of fresh straw. The animal leaned over a little against the wall, and they knew she was grateful for the shelter and the support. Then the head began to sway in a weary rhythm from side to side as if the pain drove it on. Her breath quickened, broke into little pants. He noted the thin vapour that steamed from about her body. The Herd laid his hand on her snout. It

was dry and red hot. He turned away, leading the child by the hand, the lantern swinging from the other, throwing long yellow streaks of light about the gloom of the stable. He closed the door softly behind him.

II

It was late that night when the Herd got back from his rounds of the pastures. His boots soaked in the wet ground and the clothes clung to his limbs, for the rain had come down heavily. A rumble of thunder sounded over the hills as he raised the latch of his door. He felt glad he had not left the white goat tethered in the whins on the hill.

His little daughter had gone to sleep. His wife told him the child on being put to bed had wept bitterly, but refused to confess the cause of her grief. The Herd said nothing, but he knew the child had wept for the white goat. The thought of the child's emotion moved him, and he turned out of the house again, standing in the darkness and the rain. Why had they attacked the poor brute? He asked the question over and over again, but only

the rain beat in his face and around him was darkness, mystery. Then he heard the voices higher up on the side of the hill, first a laugh, then some shouts and cries. A thick voice raised the refrain of a song, and it came booming through the murky atmosphere. The Herd could hear the words:

Where are the legs with which you run?
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Where are the legs with which you run?
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Where are the legs with which you run
When first you went to carry a gun?
Indeed, your dancing days are done!
Och, Johnny, I hardly knew ye!

And then came the chorus like a roar down the hills:

With drums and guns, and guns and drum
The enemy nearly slew ye;
My darling dear, you look so queer,
Och, Johnny, I hardly knew ye!

The voices of the labourers passing from the tillage fields died away, and the rumble of thunder came down more frequently from the hills. The Herd crossed his garden, his boots sinking in the soft ground. Half way across he paused, for a loud cry had dominated the fury of the breaking storm. His ears were quick for the cries of animals in distress. He went on rapidly toward the stable.

The ground grew more sloppy and a thin stream of water came from the rim of his soft black hat, streaming down his face. He noted the flashes of lightning overhead. Through it all the cry of the white goat sounded, with that weird, vibrating "mag-gag" that was the traditional note of her race. It had a powerful appeal for the Herd. It stirred a feeling of passion within him as he hurried through the rain.

How they must have lacerated her, a poor brute chained to the sod, at the mercy of their abuse! The red row of marks along her gams, raw and terrible, sprang to his sight out of the darkness. Vengeance, vengeance! He gripped his powerful hands, opening and closing the

fists. Then he was conscious of something in the storm and the darkness that robbed him of his craving for personal vengeance. All that belonged to the primitive man welled up in him. He knew that in the heart of the future there lurked a reckoning—something, somebody—that would count the tally at the appointed time. Then he had turned round the gable of the stable. He saw the ghostly white thing, shadowy in the blackness, lying prostrate before the door. He stood still, his breath drawn inward.

There was a movement in the white shape. He could discern the blurred outline of the head of the animal as she raised it up a little. There was a low moan followed by a great cry. The Herd stood still, terror in his heart. For he interpreted that cry in all the terrible inarticulate consciousness of his own being. That cry sounded in his ears like an appeal to all the generations of wronged dumb things that had ever come under the lash of the tyranny of men. It was the protest of the brute creation against humanity, and to the Herd it was a judgment. Then his eyes caught a murky gleam beside the

fallen white shape, and the physical sense of things jumped back to his mind.

He remembered that in wet weather a pool of water always gathered before the stable door. He remembered that there was a glimmer of it there when he had led the white goat into the stable. He remembered how she had shown fear of it.

He stooped down over the white goat where she lay. Thin wisps of her hair floated about looking like dim wraiths against the blackness of the pool. He caught a look of the brown eyes and was aware that the udder and teats bulged up from the water. He sank down beside her, the water making a splash as his knees dropped into the place. The animal raised her head a little and with pain, for the horns seemed to weigh like lead. But it was an acknowledgment that she was conscious of his presence; then the head fell back, a gurgle sounding over one of the ears.

The Herd knew what had happened, and it was all very tragical to his mind. His wife had come out to the stable for something, and had left the door open behind her. The white goat, goaded by

the growing pain, had staggered out the door, perhaps feeling some desire for the open fields in her agony. Then she had seen before the threshold of the door that which had always been a horror to her—a pool of water. The Herd could see her tottering and swaying and then falling into it with a cry, fulfilling her destiny. He wondered if he himself had the same instinct for the things that would prove fatal to him? Why was he always so nervous when he stooped to or lay upon the ground? Why did it always give him a feeling that he would be trampled under the hooves of stampeding cattle rounded up for treatment for the warble fly? He trembled as he heard the beat of hooves on the ground behind him. He peered about and for a while did not recognise the shape that moved restlessly about in the darkness. He heard the neigh of the brood mare. He knew then she had been hovering about the stable afraid to go in out of the storm. She was afraid to go in because of the thing that lay before the stable door. He heard the answering call of the young foal in the stable, and he knew that it, too, was afraid to come out

even at the call of its dam. Death was about in that night of storm, and all things seemed conscious of it.

He stooped down over the white goat and worked his hands under her shoulders. He lifted her up and felt the strain all over his frame, the muscles springing tense on his arms. She was a dead weight, and he had always prided on her size. His knees dug into the puddle in the bottom of the pool as he felt the pressure on his haunches. He strained hard as he got one of his feet under him. With a quick effort he got the other foot into position and rose slowly, lifting the white form out of the pool. The shaggy hair hung from the white goat, limp and reeking, numerous thin streams of water making a little ripple as they fell. The limbs of the Herd quivered under the weight, he staggered back, his heavy boots grinding in the gravel; then he set his teeth, the limbs steadied themselves, he swayed uncertainly for a moment, then staggered across the stable door, conscious of the hammer strokes of the heart of the white goat beating against his own heart. He laid her down in the bed of straw and heard the

young foal bounding out of the stable in terror. The Herd stood in the place, the sweat breaking out on his forehead, then dropping in great beads.

The white goat began to moan. The Herd was aware from the rustling of the straw that her limbs were working convulsively. He knew from the nature of her wounds that her death would be prolonged, her agonies extreme. What if he put her out of pain? It would be all over in a moment. His hand went to his pocket, feeling it on the outside. He made out the shape of the knife, but hesitated.

One of the hooves of the white goat struck him on the ankle as her limbs worked convulsively. His hand went into his pocket and closed around the weapon. He would need to be quick and sure, to have a steady hand, to make a swift movement. He allowed himself some moments to decide. Then the blade of the knife shot back with a snap.

The sound seemed to reach the white goat in all its grim significance. She struggled to her feet, moaning more loudly. The Herd began to breathe hard. He was afraid she would cry out even as she had

cried out as she lay in the pool before the stable door. The terror of the things that made up that cry broke in upon the Herd. He shook with fear of it. Then he stooped swiftly, his fingers nervously feeling over the delicate course of the throat of the white goat. His hands moved a little backwards and forwards in the darkness. He felt the hot stream on his hands, then the animal fell without a sound, her horns striking against the wall. He stood over her for a moment and was conscious that his hands were wet. Then he remembered with a shudder that the whole tragedy of the night had been one of rains and pools and water and clinging damp things, of puddles and sweats and blood. Even now the knife he held in his fingers was dripping. He let it fall. It fell with a queer thud, sounding of flesh, of a dead body. It had fallen on the dead body of the white goat. He turned with a groan and made his way uncertainly for the stable door.

At the door he stood, thoughts crowding in upon him, questions beating upon his brain and giving no time for answer. Around him was darkness, mystery,

Death. What right had he to thrust his hand blindly into the heart of this mystery? Who had given him the power to hasten the end, to summon Death before its time? Had not Nature her own way for counting out the hours and the minutes? Had not she, or some other power, appointed an hour for the white goat to die? She would live, even in agony, until they could bear her up no longer; and having died Nature would pass her through whatever channel her laws had ordained. Had not the white goat made her last protest against his interference when she had risen to her feet in her death agony? And if the white goat, dumb beast that she was, had suffered wrong at the hands of man, then there was, the Herd now knew, a Power deliberate and inexorable, scrupulous in its delicate adjustment of right and wrong, that would balance the account at the appointed audit.

He had an inarticulate understanding of these things as he moved from the stable door. He tripped over a barrow unseen in the darkness and fell forward on his face into the field. As he lay there he heard the thudding of hooves on the

ground. He rose, dizzy and unnerved, to see the dim shapes of some cattle that had gathered down about the place from the upland. He felt the rain beating upon his face, the clothes hung dank and clammy to his limbs. His boots soaked and slopped when he stepped. A boom of thunder sounded overhead and a vivid flash of lightning lit up for an instant a great elm tree. He saw all its branches shining with water, drops glistening along a thousand stray twigs. Then the voices of the labourers returning over the hills broke in upon his ears. He heard their shouts, the snatches of their songs, their noise, all the ribaldry of men merry in their drink.

The Herd groped through the darkness for his house like a half-blind man, his arms out before him, and a sudden gust of wind that swept the hillside shrieked about the blood of the white goat that was still wet upon his hands.

THE SICK CALL

A MAN wearing the grey frieze coat and the soft black hat of the peasantry rode up to the Monastery gate on a wiry, long-tailed nag. When he rang the bell at the hall-door there was a clatter of sandals on a flagged hall inside.

The door was opened by a lay Brother in a brown habit, a girdle about the waist from which a great Rosary beads was suspended. The peasant turned a soft black hat nervously in his hands as he delivered his message. The Friar who visited ailing people was, he said, wanted. A young man was lying very ill away up on the hills. Nothing that had been done for him was of any account. He was now very low, and his people were troubled. Maybe the Friar would come and raise his holy hands over Kevin Hooban?

The peasant gave some account of how the place might be reached. Half an hour later the Spanish Friar was on a side-car on his way to the mountain. I was on the

other side of the car. The Spanish Friar spoke English badly. The peasantry—most of whom had what they called *Béarla briste* (broken English)—could understand only an occasional word of what he said. At moments of complete deadlock I, a Mass server, acted as a sort of interpreter. For this, and for whatever poor companionship I afforded, I found myself on the sick call.

The road brought us by a lake which gave a chilly air to the landscape in the winter day, then past a strip of country meagrely wooded. We turned into a narrow road that struck the hills at once, skirting a sloping place covered with scrub and quite dark, like a black patch on the landscape. After that it was a barren pasture, prolific only in bleached boulders of rocks, of bracken that lay wasted, of broom that was sere. It was a very still afternoon, not a breath of wind stirring. Sheep looking bulky in their heavy fleeces lay about in the grass, so motionless that they might be the work of a vigorous sculptor. The branches of the trees were so still, so delicate in their outlines against the pale sky, that they made

one uneasy; they seemed to have lost the art of waving, as if leaves should never again flutter upon them. A net-work of low stone walls put loosely together, marking off the absurdly small fields, straggled over the face of the landscape, looking in the curious evening light like a great grey web fantastically spun by some humorous spider. The brown figure of a shepherd with a sheep crook in his hand rose up on a distant hill. He might be a sacred figure in the red chancel of the western sky. In a moment he was gone, leaving one doubtful if he had not been an illusion. A long army of starlings trailed rapidly across the horizon, a wriggling motion marking their course like the motion in the body of a gigantic snake. Everything on the hills seemed, as the light reddened and failed, to grow vast, grotesque. The silence which reigned over it all was oppressive.

Stray cabins skirted the roadside. Some people moved about them, leaving one the impression of a remoteness that was melancholy. The women in their bare feet made little curtesies to the Friar. Children in long dresses ran into the cabins at sight of the strangers, like rabbits

scuttling back to their burrows. Having found refuge they looked out over the half-doors as the car passed, their eyes sparkling, humorous, full of an alert inquisitiveness, their faces fresh as the wind.

A group of people swung along the road, speaking volubly in Irish, giving one the impression that they had made a great journey across the range of hills. They gave us a salutation that was also a blessing. We pulled up the car and they gathered about the Friar, looking up at him from under their broad-brimmed black hats, the countenances for the most part dark and primitive, the type more of Firbolg than Milesian origin.

When the Friar spoke to them they paused, shuffled, looked at each other, puzzled. Half unconsciously I repeated the priest's words for them.

"Oh, you are heading for the house where Kevin Hooban is lying sick?"

"Yes."

"The priest is going to read over him?"

"Yes."

"And maybe they are expecting him?"

"Yes."

"We heard it said he is very low, a strangeness coming over him."

"Is the house far?"

"No, not too far when you are once a-past the demesne wall, with the ivy upon it. Keep on the straight road. You will come to a stream and a gullet and a road clipping into the hills from it to the right; go past that road. West of that you will see two poplar trees. Beyond them you will come to a boreen. Turn down that boreen; it is very narrow, and you had best turn up one side of the car and both sit together, or maybe the thorny hedges would be slashing you on the face in the darkness of the place. At the end of the boreen you will come to a shallow river, and it having a shingle bottom. Put the mare to it and across with you. Will you be able to remember all that?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Very well. Listen now. When you are across the river with the shingly bottom draw up on the back meadow. You will see a light shining to the north. Let one bawl out of you and Patch Keetly will be at hand to take the mare by the head. He will bring you to the house where Kevin Hooban is lying in his trouble. And God grant, Father, that you

will be able to reach out a helping hand to him, and to put your strength in holy words between him and them that has a hold of him; he is a fine young man without fault or blemish, and the grandest maker of music that ever put a lip to the fideóg. Keep an eye out for the poplar trees."

"Very good. God be with you."

"God speed you kindly."

We drove on. As we did so we tried to piece the directions together. The two poplar trees appeared to touch some curious strain of humour in the Spanish Friar. But it all came to pass as the prophet had spoken. We came to the ivy wall, to the stream, the gullet, the road that clipped into the hills to the right, and a long way beyond it the two poplar trees, tall, shadowy, great in their loneliness on the hills, sentinels that appeared to guard some mountain frontier. The light had rapidly gone. The whole landscape had swooned away into a vague, dark chaos. Overhead the stars began to show, the air was cutting; it bit with frost. And then we turned down the dark boreen, the mare venturing into it with some misgiving. I

think the Friar was praying in an undertone in his native Basque as we passed through the narrow mountain boreen. At the end of it we came to the shallow river with the shingly bottom. Again the mare required some persuasion before she ventured in, the wheels crunching on the gravel, her fetlocks splashing the slow-moving, chocolate-coloured water. On the opposite bank we reached a sort of plateau, seen vaguely in the light. I "let a bawl out of me." It was like the cry of some lonely, lost bird on the wing. The Friar shook with laughter. I could feel the little rock of his body on the springs of the car. A figure came suddenly out of the darkness and silently took the mare by the head. The car moved on across the vague back meadow. Patch Keetly was piloting us to a light that shone in the north.

People were standing about the front of the long, low-thatched house. Lights shone in all the windows, the door stood open. The people did not speak or draw near as we got down from the car. There was a fearful silence about the place. The grouping of the people expressed mystery.

They eyed us from their curiously aloof angles. They seemed as much a part of the atmosphere of the hills, as fixed in the landscape as the little clumps of furze or the two lonely poplars that mounted guard over the mouth of the boreen.

"Won't the holy Father be going into the house?" Patch Keetly asked. "I will unyoke the mare and give her a share of oats in the stable."

The Friar spoke to me in an undertone, and we crossed to the open door of the house.

The door led directly into the kitchen. Two women were standing well back from the door, something respectful, a little mysterious and a little fearful in their attitude. Their eyes were upon the Friar, and from their expressions they might have expected some sort of apparition to cross the threshold. They made a curtesy to him, dipping their bodies in a little sudden jerk. Nobody else was in the kitchen, and, despite the almost oppressive formality of their attitude, they somehow conveyed a sense of the power of women in the household in time of crisis. They were in supreme command, the men all

outside, when a life had to be battled for. The elder of the women came forward and spoke to the priest, bidding him welcome. The reception looked as if it had been rehearsed, both women painfully anxious to do what was right.

There appeared some little misunderstanding, and I was too dazed with the cold—which I had only fully felt when I got off the car and found my legs cramped—to come to the rescue as interpreter. The Spanish Friar was accustomed to these little embarrassments, and he had a manner of meeting them with a smile. The misunderstanding and the embarrassment seemed to thaw the formality of the reception. The women looked relieved. They were obviously not expected to say anything, and they had no fear now that they would be put to the ordeal of meeting a possibly superior person, one who might patronise them, make a flutter in their home, appal them by expecting a great deal of attention, in short, be "very Englified." The Spanish Friar had very quick intuitions and some subtle way of his own for conveying his emotions and his requirements. He was in spirit nearer to the

peasantry than many of the Friars who themselves came from the flesh of the peasantry. And these two peasant women, very quick in both their intuitions and their intelligence, seemed at the very moment of the breakdown of the first attempt at conversation to understand him and he to understand them. The elder of the women led the priest into a room off the kitchen where I knew Kevin Hooban lay ill.

The younger woman put a chair before the fire and invited me to sit there. While I sat before the fire I could hear the quick but quiet step of her feet about the kitchen, the little swish of her garments. Presently she drew near to the fire and held out a glass. It contained what looked like discoloured water, very like the water in the shallow river with the shingly bottom. I must have expressed some little surprise, even doubt, in my face, for she held the glass closer, as if reassuring me. There was something that inspired confidence in her manner. I took the glass and sipped the liquid. It left a half-burned, peaty taste in the mouth, and somehow smacked very native in its

flavour. I thought of the hills, the lonely bushes, the slow movement of the chocolate-coloured river, the men with the primitive dark faces under the broad-brimmed hats, their mysterious, even dramatic way of grouping themselves around the lighted house. The peaty liquid seemed a brew out of the same atmosphere. I knew it was poteen. And in a moment I felt it coursing through my body, warming my blood. The young woman stood by the fire, half in shadow, half in the yellow flame of the turf fire, her attitude quiet but tense, very alert for any movement in the sick room.

The door of the room stood slightly open, and the low murmur of the Friar's voice reciting a prayer in Latin could be heard. The young woman sighed, her bosom rising and falling in a quick breath of pain. Then she made the sign of the Cross.

"My brother is very low," she said, sitting down by the fire after a time. Her eyes were upon the fire. Her face was less hard than the faces I had seen on the hills. She looked good-natured.

"Is he long ill?"

"This long while. But to look at him you would conceit he was as sound as a trout. First he was moody, moping about the place, and no way wishful for company. Hours he would spend below at the butt of the meadow, nearby the water, sitting under the thorn bush and he playing upon the fideóg. Then he began to lose the use of his limbs, and crying he used to be within in the room. Some of the people who have knowledge say he is lying under a certain influence. He cannot speak now. The holy Friar will know what is best to be done."

When the Friar came out of the room he was divesting himself of the embroidered stole he had put over his shoulders.

The white-capped old woman had excitement in her face as she followed him.

"Kevin spoke," she said to the other. "He looked up at the blessed man and he made an offer to cross himself. I could not hear the words he was speaking, that soft they come from his lips."

"Kevin will live," said the younger woman, catching some of the excitement of her mother. She stood tensely, drawn up near the fire, gazing vacantly but

intently across the kitchen, as if she would will it so passionately that Kevin should live that he would live. She moved suddenly, swiftly, noiselessly across the floor and disappeared into the room.

The priest sat by the fire for some time, the old woman standing by, respectful, but her eyes riveted upon him as if she would pluck from him all the secrets of existence. The priest was conscious, a little uneasy, and a little amused, at this abnormal scrutiny. Some shuffling sounded outside the house as if a drove of shy animals had come down from the mountain and approached the dwelling. Presently the door creaked. I looked at it uneasily. The atmosphere of the place, the fumes of the poteen in my head, the heat of the fire, had given me a more powerful impression of the mysterious, the weird. Nothing showed at the door for some time, but I kept my eye upon it. I was rewarded. A cluster of heads and shoulders of men, swarthy, gloomy, some awful foreboding in the expression of their faces, hung round the door and peered silently down at the Friar seated at the fire. Again I had the sense that they would not

be surprised to see any sort of apparition. The heads disappeared, and there was more shuffling outside the windows as if shy animals were hovering around the house. The door creaked again, and another bunch of heads and shoulders made a cluster about it. They looked, as far as I could see them, the same group of heads, but I had the feeling that they were fresh spectators. They were taking their view in turn.

The priest ventured some conversation with the woman of the house.

"Do you think will Kevin live, Father?"

"He should have more courage," the Friar said.

"We will all have more courage now that you have read over him."

"Keep the faith. It is all in the hands of God. It is only what is pleasing to Him that will come to pass."

"Blessed be His Holy Name." The woman inclined her head as she spoke the words. The priest rose to go.

The young girl came out of the room. "Kevin will live," she said. "He spoke to me." Her eyes were shining as she gazed at her mother.

"Could you tell what words he spoke?"

"I could. He said, 'In the month of April, when the water runs clear in the river, I will be playing the fideóg.' That is what Kevin said."

"When the river is clear—playing the fideóg," the elder woman repeated, some look of trouble, almost terror, in her face. "The cross of Christ between him and that fideóg!"

The priest was moving to the door and I followed. As I did so I got a glimpse, through the partly open room door, of the invalid. I saw the long, pallid, nervous-looking face of a young man on the pillow. A light fell on his brow, and I thought it had the height, and the arch, the good shape sloping backward to the long head, of a musician. The eyes were shining with an unnatural brightness. It was the face of an artist, an idealist, intensified, idealised, by illness, by suffering, by excitement, and I wondered if the vision which Kevin Hooban had of playing the fideóg by the river, when it ran clear in April, were a vision of his heaven or his earth.

We left the house. Patch Keetly was taking the loop from a trace as he harnessed the mare in the yellow light of a stable lantern. We mounted the car. The groups of men drew about us, their movements again sounding like the shuffling of shy animals on the sod, and they broke silence for the first time.

There was more said about Kevin Hooban. From various allusions, vague and unsubstantial, little touches in the kind, musical voices, I gathered that they believed him to be under the influence of the Good People. The sense of mystery and ill-omen came back to me, and I carried away a memory of the dark figures of the people grouped about the lonely lighted house, standing there in sorrow for the flute-player, the grass at their feet sparkling with frost.

THE SHOEMAKER

OBEYING a domestic mandate, Padna wrapped a pair of boots in paper and took them to the shoemaker, who operated behind a window in a quiet street.

The shoemaker seemed to Padna a melancholy man. He wore great spectacles, had a white patch of forehead, and two great bumps upon it. Padna concluded that the bumps had been encouraged by the professional necessity of constantly hanging his head over his knees.

The shoemaker invited Padna to sit down in his workshop, which he did. Padna thought it must be very dreary to sit there all day among old and new boots, pieces of leather, boxes of brass eyelets, awls, knives, and punchers. No wonder the shoemaker was a melancholy-looking man.

Padna maintained a discreet silence while the shoemaker turned his critical glasses upon the boots he had brought him

for repair. Suddenly the great glasses were turned upon Padna himself, and the shoemaker addressed him in a voice of amazing pleasantness.

"When did you hear the cuckoo?" he asked.

Padna, at first startled, pulled himself together. "Yesterday," he replied.

"Did you look at the sole of your boot when you heard him?" the shoemaker asked.

"No," said Padna.

"Well," said the shoemaker, "whenever you hear the cuckoo for the first time in the spring always look at the sole of your right boot. There you will find a hair. And that hair will tell you the kind of a wife you will get."

The shoemaker picked a long hair from the sole of Padna's boot and held it up in the light of the window.

"You'll be married to a brown-haired woman," he said. Padna looked at the hair without fear, favour, or affection, and said nothing.

The shoemaker took his place on his bench, selected a half-made shoe, got it between his knees, and began to stitch with

great gusto. Padna admired the skilful manner in which he made the holes with his awl and drew the wax-end with rapid strokes. Padna abandoned the impression that the shoemaker was a melancholy man. He thought he never sat near a man so optimistic, so mentally emancipated, so detached from the indignity of his occupation.

"These are very small shoes you are stitching," said Padna, making himself agreeable.

"They are," said the shoemaker. "But do you know who makes the smallest shoes in the world? You don't? Well, well! . . . The smallest shoes in the world are made by the clurichaun, a cousin of the leprechaun. If you creep up on the west side of a fairy fort after the sun has set and put your ear to the grass you'll hear the tapping of his hammer. And do you know who the clurichaun makes shoes for? You don't? Well, well! . . . He makes shoes for the swallows. Oh, indeed they do, swallows wear shoes. Twice a year swallows wear shoes. They wear them in the spring, and again at the fall of the year. They wear them when they fly from one

world to another. And they cross the Dead Sea. Did you ever hear tell of the Dead Sea? You did. Well, well! . . . No bird ever yet flew across the Dead Sea. Any of them that tried it dropped and sank like a stone. So the swallows, when they come to the Dead Sea, get down on the bank, and there the clurichauns have millions of shoes waiting for them. The swallows put on their shoes and walk across the Dead Sea, stepping on bright yellow and black stepping-stones that shine across the water like a lovely carpet. And do you know what the stepping-stones across the Dead Sea are? They are the backs of sleeping frogs. And when the swallows are all safe across the frogs waken up and begin to sing, for then it is known the summer will come. Did you never hear that before? No? Well, well!"

A cat, friendly as the shoemaker himself, leapt on to Padna's lap. The shoemaker shifted the shoe he was stitching between his knees, putting the heel where the toe had been.

"Do you know where they first discovered electricity?" he asked.

"In America," Padna ventured.

"No. In the back of a cat. He was a big buck Chinese cat. Every hair on him was seven inches long, in colour gold, and thick as copper wire. He was the only cat who ever looked on the face of the Empress of China without blinking, and when the Emperor saw that he called him over and stroked him on the back. No sooner did the Emperor of China stroke the buck cat than back he fell on his plush throne, as dead as his ancestors. So they called in seven wise doctors from the seven wise countries of the East to find out what it was killed the Emperor. And after seven years they discovered electricity in the backbone of the cat, and signed a proclamation that it was from the shock of it the Emperor had died. When the Americans read the proclamation they decided to do whatever killing had to be done as the cat had killed the Emperor of China. The Americans are like that—all for imitating royal families."

"Has this cat any electricity in her?" Padna asked.

"She has," said the shoemaker, drawing his wax-end. "But she's a civilised cat, not like the vulgar fellow in China,

and civilised cats hide their electricity much as civilised people hide their feelings. But one day last summer I saw her showing her electricity. A monstrous black rat came prowling from the brewery, a bald patch on his head and a piece missing from his left haunch. To see that fellow coming up out of a gullet and stepping up the street, in the middle of the broad daylight, you'd imagine he was the county inspector of police."

"And did she fight the rat?" Padna asked.

The shoemaker put the shoe on a last and began to tap with his hammer. "She did fight him," he said. "She went out to him twirling her moustaches. He lay down on his back. She lay down on her side. They kept grinning and sparring at each other like that for half an hour. At last the monstrous rat got up in a fury and come at her, the fangs stripped. She swung round the yard, doubled in two, making circles like a Catherine-wheel about him until the old blackguard was mesmerised. And if you were to see the bulk of her tail then, all her electricity gone into it! She caught him with a blow of it under the

jowl,' and he fell in a swoon. She stood over him, her back like the bend of a hoop, the tail beating about her, and a smile on the side of her face. And that was the end of the monstrous brewery rat."

Padna said nothing, but put the cat down on the floor. When she made some effort to regain his lap he surreptitiously suggested, with the tip of his boot, that their entente was at an end.

A few drops of rain beat on the window, and the shoemaker looked up, his glasses shining, the bumps on his forehead gleaming. "Do you know the reason God makes it rain?" he asked.

Padna, who had been listening to the conversation of two farmers the evening before, replied, "I do. To make turnips grow."

"Nonsense!" said the shoemaker, reaching out for an awl. "God makes it rain to remind us of the Deluge. And I don't mean the Deluge that was at all at all. I mean the Deluge that is to come. The world will be drowned again. The belly-band of the sky will give, for that's what the rainbow is, and it only made of colours. Did you never know until now what the rainbow

was? No? Well, well! . . . As I was saying, when the belly-band of the sky bursts the Deluge will come. In one minute all the valleys of the earth will be filled up. In the second minute the mountains will be topped. In the third minute the sky will be emptied and its skin gone, and the earth will be no more. There will be no ark, no Noah, and no dove. There will be nothing only one great waste of grey water and in the middle of it one green leaf. The green leaf will be a sign that God has gone to sleep, the trouble of the world banished from His mind. So whenever it rains remember my words."

Padna said he would, and then went home.

II

When Padna called on the shoemaker for the boots that had been left for repair they were almost ready. The tips only remained to be put on the heels. Padna sat down in the little workshop, and under the agreeable influence of the place he made bold to ask the shoemaker if he had grown up to be a shoemaker as the geranium had

grown up to be a geranium in its pot on the window.

"What!" exclaimed the shoemaker. "Did you never hear tell that I was found in the country under a head of cabbage? No! Well, well! What do they talk to you at home about at all?"

"The most thing they tell me," said Padna, "is to go to bed and get up in the morning. What is the name of the place in the country where they found you?"

"Gobstown," said the shoemaker. "It was the most miserable place within the ring of Ireland. It lay under the blight of a good landlord, no better. That was its misfortune, and especially my misfortune. If the Gobstown landlord was not such a good landlord it's driving on the box of an empire I would be to-day instead of whacking tips on the heels of your boots. How could that be? I'll tell you that.

"In Gobstown the tenants rose up and demanded a reduction of rent; the good landlord gave it to them. They rose up again and demanded another reduction of rent; he gave it to them. They went on rising up, asking reductions, and getting them, until there was no rent left for any-

one to reduce. The landlord was as good and as poor as our best.

"And while all this was going on Gobstown was surrounded by estates where there were the most ferocious landlords—rack-renting, absentee, evicting landlords, landlords as wild as tigers. And these tiger landlords were leaping at their tenants and their tenants slashing back at them as best they could. Nothing, my dear, but blood and the music of grape-shot and shouts in the night from the jungle. In Gobstown we had to sit down and look on, pretending, moryah, that we were as happy as the day was long.

"Not a scalp was ever brought into Gobstown. No man of us ever went out on an adventure which might bring him home again through the mouth of the county jail. Not a secret enterprise that might become a great public excitement was ever hatched, not to speak of being launched. We had not as much as a fife-and-drum band. We did not know how to play a tin whistle or beat upon the tintinnabulum. We never waved a green flag. We had not a branch of any kind of a league. We had no men of skill to draft a resolution, indite a

threatening letter, draw a coffin, skull, and cross-bones, fight a policeman, or even make a speech. We were never a delegate at a convention, an envoy to America, a divisional executive, a deputation, or a demonstration. We were nothing. We wilted under the blight of our good landlord as the green stalk wilts under the frost of the black night. . . . Hand me that knife. The one with the wooden handle.

"In desperation we used rouse ourselves and march into the demonstrations on other estates. We were a small and an unknown tribe. The Gobstown contingent always brought up the rear of the procession—a gawky, straggling, bad-stepping, hay-foot, straw-foot lot! The onlookers hardly glanced at us. We stood for nothing. We had no name. Once we rigged up a banner with the words on it, 'Gobstown to the Front!' but still we were put to the back, and when we walked through this town the servant girls came out of their kitchens, laughed at us, and called out, 'Gobstown to the Back of the Front!'

"The fighting men came to us, took us aside, and asked us what we were doing in Gobstown. We had no case to make.

We offered to bring forward our good landlord as a shining example, to lead our lamb forward in order that he might show up the man-eaters on the other estates. The organisers were all hostile. They would not allow us into the processions any more. If we could bring forward some sort of roaring black devil we would be more than welcome. Shining examples were not in favour. We were sent home in disgrace and broke up. As the preachers say, our last state was worse than our first.

"We became sullen and drowsy and fat and dull. We got to hate the sight of each other, so much so that we began to pay our rents behind each other's backs, at first the reduced rents, then, gale day by gale day, we got back to the original rent, and kept on paying it. Our good landlord took his rents and said nothing. Gobstown became the most accursed place in all Ireland. Brother could not trust brother. And there were our neighbours going from one sensation to another. They were as lively as trout, as enterprising as goats, as intelligent as Corkmen. They were thin and eager and good-tempered. They ate very little, drank water, slept well, men with hard

knuckles, clean bowels, and pale eyes. Anything they hit went down. They were always ready to go to the gallows for each other.

"I had a famous cousin on one of these estates, and I suppose you heard of him? You didn't! What are they teaching you at school at all? Latin grammar? Well, well! . . . My cousin was a clumsy fellow with only a little of middling kind of brains, but a bit of fight in him. Yet look at the way he got on, and look at me, shodding little boys like yourself! I was born under a lucky star but my cousin was born under a lucky landlord—a ferocious fellow who got into a garret in London and kept roaring across at Ireland for more and more blood. Every time I thought of that old skin of a man howling in the London garret I said to myself, 'He'll be the making of my cousin.' And so, indeed, he was. Three agents were brought down on my cousin's estate. State trials were running like great plays in the courthouse. Blood was always up. They had six fife-and-drum bands and one brass band. They had green and gold banners with harps and streamers, and mottoes in yellow lettering,

that took four hardy men to carry on a windy day. The heads of the Peelers were hardly ever out of their helmets. The resident magistrate rose one day in the bosom of his family, his eyes closed, to say grace before meals, and from dint of habit he was chanting the Riot Act over the table until his wife flew at him with, 'How dare you, George! The mutton is quite all right!' Little boys no bigger than yourself walking along the roads to school in that splendid estate could jump up on the ditch and make good speeches.

"My cousin's minute books—he was secretary of everything—would stock a book-shop, and were noted for beautiful expressions. He was the author of ten styles of resolution construction. An enemy christened him Resolving Kavanagh. Every time he resolved to stand where he always stood he revolved. Everybody put up at his house. He was seen in more torchlight processions than Bryan O'Lynn. A room in his house was decorated in a beautiful scheme of illuminated addresses with border designs from the Book of Kells. The homes of the people were full of the stumps of burned-down candles, the

remains of great illuminations for my cousin whenever he came out of prison. I tell you no lie when I say that that clumsy cousin of mine became clever and polished, all through pure practice. He had the best of tutors. The skin of a landlord in the London garret, his agents, their under-strappers, removable magistrates, judges, Crown solicitors, county inspectors of police, sergeants, constables, secret service men,—all drove him from fame to fame until in the end they chased him out the only gap that was left open to the like of him—the English Parliament. Think of the streak of that man's career! And there was I, a man of capacity and brains, born with the golden spoon of talent in my mouth, dead to the world in Gobstown! I was rotting like a turnip under the best and the most accursed of landlords. In the end I could not stand it—no man of spirit could.

"One day I took down my ashplant, spat on my fist, and set out for my cousin's place. He gave me no welcome. I informed him as to how the land lay in Gobstown. I said we must be allowed to make a name for ourselves as the producers of a shining example of a landlord. My cousin

let his head lie over a little to one side and then said, 'In this country shining examples ought only be used with the greatest moderation.' He looked out through the window and after some time said, 'That Gobstown landlord is the most dangerous lunatic in all Ireland.' 'How is that?' said I. 'Because,' said my famous cousin, 'he has a perfect heart.' He put his head over to the other side, looked at me and said, 'If Gobstown does not do something he may be the means of destroying us all.' 'How?' said I. 'He may become contagious,' said my cousin. 'Only think of his example being followed and Ireland turned into one vast tract of Gobstowns! Would not any fate at all be better than that?' I who knew said, 'God knows it would.'

"My cousin sighed heavily. He turned from me, leaving me standing there in the kitchen, and I saw him moving with a ladder to the loft overhead. This he mounted and disappeared in the black rafters. I could hear him fumbling somewhere under the thatch. Presently down he came the ladder, a gun in one hand, and a fistful of cartridges in the other. He

spoke no word, and I spoke no word. He came to me and put the gun in my hand and the handful of cartridges in my pocket. He walked to the fire and stood there with his back turned. I stood where I was, a Gobstown mohawk, with the gun in my hand. At last I said, 'What is this for?' and grounded the gun a little on the floor. My cousin did not answer at once. At last he said without moving, 'It's for stirring your tea, what else?' I looked at him and he remained as he was and, the sweat breaking out on the back of my neck, I left the house and made across the fields for home, the cartridges rattling in my pocket every ditch I leapt, the feel of the gun in my hand becoming more familiar and more friendly.

"At last I came to the summit of a little green hill overlooking Gobstown, and there I sat me down. The sight of Gobstown rose the gorge in me. Nothing came out of it but weak puffs of turf smoke from the chimneys—little pallid thin streaks that wobbled in the wind. There, says I, is the height of Gobstown. And no sound came up out of it except the cackle of geese, and then the bawl of an old ass in the bog.

There, says I, is the depth of Gobstown. And rising up from the green hill I made up my mind to save Ireland from Gobstown even if I lost my own soul. I would put a bullet in the perfect heart of our good landlord.

"That night I lay behind a certain ditch. The moon shone on the nape of my neck. The good landlord passed me by on the road, he and his good wife, chattering and happy as a pair of lovers. I groped for the gun. The queerest feeling came over me. I did not even raise it. I had no nerve. I quaked behind the ditch. His footsteps and her footsteps were like cracks of this hammer on my head. I knew, then, in that minute, that I was no good, and that Gobstown was for ever lost. . . What happened me? Who can say that for certain? Many a time have I wondered what came over me in that hour. I can only guess. . . . Nobody belonging to me had ever been rack-rented. I had never seen any of my own people evicted. No great judge of assize had ever looked down on me from his bench to the dock and addressed to me stern words. I had never heard the clang behind me of a prison door. No royal hand

of an Irish constabularyman had ever brought a baton down on my head. No carbine had ever butted the soft places of my body. I had no scars that might redden with memories. The memories I had and that might give me courage were not memories of landlords. There was nothing of anger in my heart for the Gobstown landlord, and he went by. I dragged my legs out of the ditch and drowned my cousin's gun in a boghole. After it I dropped in the handful of cartridges. They made a little gurgle in the dark water like blood in a shot man's throat. And that same night I went home, put a few things in a red handkerchief, and stole out of Gobstown like a thief. I walked along the roads until I came to this town, learned my trade, became a respectable shoemaker, and—tell your mother I never use anything only the best leather. There are your boots, Padna, tips and all . . . . . half-a-crown. Thanks, and well wear!"

THE RECTOR

HE Rector came round the gable of the church. He walked down the sanded path that curved to the road. Half-way down he paused, meditated, then turning gazed at the building. It was square and solid, bulky against the background of the hills. The Rector hitched up his cuffs as he gazed at the structure. Critical puckers gathered in little lines across the preserved, peach-like cheeks. He put his small, nicely-shaped head to one side. There was a proprietorial, concerned air in his attitude. One knew that he was thinking of the repairs to the church, anxious about the gutters, the downpipe, the missing slates on the roof, the painting of the doors and windows. He struck an attitude as he pondered the problem of the cracks on the pebble-dashed walls. His umbrella grounded on the sand with decision. He leaned out a little on it with deliberation, his lips unconsciously shaping the words of the ultimatum he should

deliver to the Select Vestry. His figure was slight, he looked old-world, almost funereal, something that had become detached, that was an outpost, half-forgotten, lonely; a man who had sunk into a parish where there was nothing to do. He mumbled a little to himself as he came down to the gate in the high wall that enclosed the church grounds.

A group of peasants was coming along the yellow, lonely road, talking and laughing. The bare-footed women stepped with great active strides, bearing themselves with energy. They carried heavy baskets from the market town, but were not conscious of their weight. The carded-wool petticoats, dyed a robust red, brought a patch of vividness to the landscape. The white "bauneens" and soft black hats of the men afforded a contrast. The Rector's eyes gazed upon the group with a schooled detachment. It was the look of a man who stood outside of their lives, who did not expect to be recognised, and who did not feel called upon to seem conscious of these peasant folk. The eyes of the peasants were unmoved, uninterested, as they were lifted to the dark figure that stood at the

rusty iron gate leading into the enclosed church grounds. He gave them no salutation. Their conversation voluble, noisy, dropped for a moment, half through embarrassment, half through a feeling that something alive stood by the wayside. A vagueness in expression on both sides was the outward signal that two conservative forces had met for a moment and refused to compromise.

One young girl, whose figure and movements would have kindled the eye of an artist, looked up and appeared as if she would smile. The Rector was conscious of her vivid face, framed in a fringe of black hair, of a mischievousness in her beauty, some careless abandon in the swing of her limbs. But something in the level dark brows of the Rector, something that was dour, forbade her smile. It died in a little flush of confusion. The peasants passed and the Rector gave them time to make some headway before he resumed his walk to the Rectory.

He looked up at the range of hills, great in their extent, mighty in their rhythm, beautiful in the play of light and mist upon them. But to the mind of the Rector they

expressed something foreign, they were part of a place that was condemned and lost. He began to think of the young girl who, in her innocence, had half-smiled at him. Why did she not smile? Was she afraid? Of what was she afraid? What evil thing had come between her and that impulse of youth? Some consciousness—of what? The Rector sighed. He had, he was afraid, knowledge of what it was. And that knowledge set his thoughts racing over their accustomed course. He ran over the long tradition of his grievances—grievances that had submerged him in a life that had not even a place in this wayside countryside. His mind worked its way down through all the stages of complaint until it arrived at the *Ne Temere* decree. The lips of the Rector no longer formed half-spoken words; they became two straight, tight little thin lines across the teeth. They would remain that way all the afternoon, held in position while he read the letters in the *Irish Times*. He would give himself up to thoughts of politics, of the deeds of wicked men, of the transactions that go on within and without governments, doping his mind with the

drug of class opiates until it was time to go to bed.

Meantime he had to pass a man who was breaking stones in a ditch by the roadside. The hard cracks of the hammer were resounding on the still air. The man looked up from his work as the Rector came along; the grey face of the stone-breaker had a melancholy familiarity for him. The Rector had an impulse—it was seldom he had one. He stood in the centre of the road. The *Ne Temere* decree went from his mind.

"Good-day, my man," he said, feeling that he had made another concession, and that it would be futile as all the others.

"Good-day, sir," the stone-breaker made answer, hitching himself upon the sack he had put under his haunches, like one very ready for a conversation.

There was a pause. The Rector did not know very well how to continue. He should, he knew, speak with some sense of colloquialism if he was to get on with this stonebreaker, a person for whom he had a certain removed sympathy. The manner of these people's speech was really a part of the grievances of the Rector. Their

conversation, he often secretly assured himself, was peppered with Romish propaganda. But the Rector made another concession.

"It's a fine day, thank God," he said. He spoke like one who was delivering a message in an unfamiliar language. "Thank God" was local, and might lend itself to an interpretation that could not be approved. But the Rector imported something into the words that was a protection, something that was of the pulpit, that held a solemnity in its pessimism.

"A fine day, indeed, glory be to God!" the stonebreaker made answer. There was a freshness in his expression, a cheerfulness in the prayer, that made of it an optimism.

The Rector was so conscious of the contrast that it gave him pause again. The peach-like colourings on the cheeks brightened, for a suspicion occurred to him. Could the fellow have meant anything? Had he deliberately set up an optimistic Deity in opposition to the pessimistic Deity of the Rector? The Rector hitched up the white cuffs under his dark sleeves, swung his umbrella, and resumed his way, his

lips puckered, a little feverish agitation seizing him.

"A strange, down-hearted kind of a man," the stonebreaker said to himself, as he reached out for a lump of lime-stone and raised his hammer. A redbreast, perched on an old thorn bush, looking out on the scene with curious eyes, stretched his wing and his leg, as much as to say, "Ah, well," sharpened his beak on a twig, and dropped into the ditch to pick up such gifts as the good earth yielded.

The Rector walked along the road pensive, but steadfast, his eyes upon the alien hills, his mind travelling over ridges of problems that never afforded the gleam of solution. He heard a shout of a laugh. Above the local accents that held a cadence of the Gaelic speech he heard the sharp clipping Northern accent of his own gardener and general factotum. He had brought the man with him when he first came to Connacht, half as a mild form of colonisation, half through a suspicion of local honesty. He now saw the man's shaggy head over the Rectory garden wall, and outside it were the peasants.

How was it that the gardener got on with

the local people? How was it that they stood on the road to speak with him, shouting their extravagant laughter at his keen, dry Northern humour?

When he first came the gardener had been more grimly hostile to the place than the Rector himself. There had been an ugly row on the road, and blows had been struck. But that was some years ago. The gardener now appeared very much merged in the life of the place; the gathering outside the Rectory garden was friendly, almost a family party. How was it to be accounted for? Once or twice the Rector found himself suspecting that at the bottom of the phenomenon there might be all unconscious among these people a spirit of common country, of a common democracy, a common humanity, that forced itself to the surface in course of time. The Rector stood, his lips working, his nicely-shaped little head quivering with a sudden agitation. For he found himself thinking along unusual lines, and for that very reason dangerous lines—frightfully dangerous lines, he told himself, as an ugly enlightenment broke across his mind, warming it up for a few moments and no more. As he turned in the gate at the

Rectory it was a relief to him—for his own thoughts were frightening him—to see the peasants moving away and the head of the gardener disappear behind the wall. He walked up the path to the Rectory, the lawn dotted over with sombre yew trees all clipped into the shape of torpedoes, all trained directly upon the forts of Heaven! The house was large and comfortable, the walls a faded yellow. Like the church, it was thrown up against the background of the hills. It had all the sombre exclusiveness that made appeal to the Rector. The sight of it comforted him at the moment, and his mental agitation died down. He became normal enough to resume his accustomed outlook, and before he had reached the end of the path his mind had become obsessed again by the thought of the *Ne Temere* decree. Something should, he felt convinced, be done, and done at once.

He ground his umbrella on the step in front of the Rectory door and pondered. At last he came to a conclusion, inspiration lighting up his faded eyes. He tossed his head upwards.

"I must write a letter to the papers," he said. "Ireland is lost."

THE HOME-COMING

Persons :

Mrs. Ford
Donagh Ford
Hugh Deely
Agnes Deely

Scene : A farmhouse in Connacht.

Hugh : They'll make short work of the high field. It's half ploughed already.

Donagh : It was good of the people to gather as they did, giving us their labour.

Hugh : The people had always a wish for your family, Donagh. Look at the great name your father left behind him in Carrabane. It would be a fine sight for him if he had lived to stand at this door now, looking at the horses bringing the plough over the ground.

Donagh : And if he could move about this house, even in his great age. He never got accustomed to the smallness of the hut down at Cussmona.

Hugh : When I was a bit of a gosoon I remember the people talking about the evic-

rion of Donagh Ford. It was terrible work used to be in Carrabane those times. Your father was the first man to fight, and that was why the people thought so well of him.

Donagh: He would never speak of it himself, for at home he was a silent, proud man. But my mother used to be telling me of it many a time.

Hugh: Your mother and yourself have the place back now. And you have Agnes to think of.

Donagh: Agnes is a good thought to me surely. Was she telling you we fixed the day of the wedding yesterday at your uncle's?

Hugh: She was not. A girl like her is often shy of speaking about a thing of that kind to her brother. I'd only be making game of her. (*A cheer is heard in the distance outside. Hugh goes to look out door.*)

Hugh: Here is the car coming up the road with your mother and Agnes. They're giving her a welcome.

Donagh (*looking out of window*): She'll be very proud of the people, they to have such a memory of my father.

Hugh: I'll run out and greet her. (*In a*

sly undertone.) Agnes is coming up. (*He goes out laughing. Donagh hangs up harness on some pegs. Agnes Deely, wearing a shawl over her head and carrying a basket on her arm, comes in.*)

Agnes : Donagh, your mother was greatly excited leaving the hut. I think she doesn't rightly understand what is happening.

Donagh : I was afeard of that. The memory slips on her betimes. She thinks she's back in the old days again.

Agnes (*going to dresser, taking parcels from the basket.*) : My father was saying that we should have everything here as much like what it used to be as we can. That's why he brought up the bin. When they were evicted he took it up to his own place because it was too big for the hut.

Donagh : Do you know, Agnes, when I came up here this morning with your brother, Hugh, I felt the place strange and lonesome. I think an evicted house is never the same, even when people go back to it. There seemed to be some sorrow hanging over it.

Agnes (*putting up her shawl*) : Now Donagh, that's no way for you to be speaking. If you were to see how glad all the

people were! And you ought to have the greatest joy.

Donagh: Well, then I thought of you, Agnes, and that changed everything. I went whistling about the place. (*Going to her.*) After coming down from your uncle's yesterday evening I heard the first cry of the cuckoo in the wood at Raheen.

Agnes: That was a good omen, Donagh.

Donagh: I took it that way, too, for it was the first greeting I got after parting from yourself. Did you hear it, Agnes?

Agnes: I did not. I heard only one sound the length of the evening.

Donagh: What sound was that, Agnes?

Agnes: I heard nothing only the singing of one song, a lovely song, all about Donagh Ford!

Donagh: About me?

Agnes: Yes, indeed. It was no bird and no voice, but the singing I heard of my own heart.

Donagh: That was a good song to hear, Agnes. It is like a thought that would often stir in a man's mind and find no word to suit it. It is often that I thought that way of you and could speak no word.

Agnes: All the same I think I would have an understanding for it, Donagh.

Donagh : Ah, Agnes, that is just it. That is what gives me the great comfort in your company. We have a great understanding of each other surely.

Hugh (*speaking outside*) : This is the way, Mrs. Ford. They are waiting for you within. (*He comes in.*) Donagh, here is your mother. (*Mrs. Ford, leaning on a stick, comes to the door, standing on the threshold for a little. Hugh and Donagh take off their hats reverently.*)

Mrs. Ford : And is that you, Donagh. Well, if it is not the fine high house you got for Agnes. Eh, pet?

Agnes (*taking shawl from her*) : It is your own house Donagh has taken you back to.

Hugh : Did you not hear the people giving you a welcome, Mrs. Ford?

Donagh : Don't you remember the house, mother?

Mrs. Ford : I have a memory of many a thing, God help me. And I heard the people cheering. I thought maybe it was some strife was going on in Carrabane. It was always a place of one struggle or another. (*She looks helplessly about house, muttering as she hobbles to the bin. She raises the lid.*) Won't you take out a

measure of oats to the mare, Donagh? And they have mislaid the scoop again. I'm tired telling them not to be leaving it in the barn. Where is that Martin Driscoll and what way is he doing his business at all? (*She turns to close the bin.*)

Hugh (*to Donagh*): Who is Martin Driscoll?

Donagh: A boy who was here long ago. I heard a story of him and a flight with a girl. He lies in a grave in Australia long years.

Mrs. Ford (*moving from bin, her eyes catching the dresser*): Who put the dresser there? Was it by my orders? That is a place where it will come awkward to me.

Agnes (*going to her*): Sit down and rest yourself. You are fatigued after making the journey.

Mrs. Ford (*as they cross to fire*): Wait until I lay eyes on Martin Driscoll and on Delia Morrissey of the cross! I tell you I will regulate them.

Donagh (*to Hugh*): Delia Morrissey—that is the name of the girl I spoke of. She was lost on the voyage, a girl of great beauty.

Agnes (*to Mrs. Ford*): Did you take no

stock of the people as you came on the car?

Mrs. Ford: In throth I did. It was prime to see them there reddening the sod and the little rain drops falling from the branches of the trees.

Hugh: They raised a great cheer for you.

Mrs. Ford: Did you say that it was to me they were giving a welcome?

Donagh: Indeed it was, mother.

Mrs. Ford (*laughing a little*): Mind that, Agnes. They are the lively lads to be taking stock of an old woman the like of me driving the roads.

Hugh: The people could not but feel some stir to see what they saw this day. I declare to you, Donagh, when I saw her old stooped dark figure thrown against the sky on the car it moved something in me.

Mrs. Ford: What are you saying about a stir in the country, Hugh Deely?

Hugh: Was it not something to see the planter going from this place? Was it not something to see you and Donagh coming from a miserable place in the bog?

Mrs. Ford (*sharply*): The planter, did you say? (*Clutching her stick to rise*). Blessed be God! Is Curley the planter gone from

Carrabane? Don't make any lie to me, Hugh Deely.

Hugh: Curley is gone.

Mrs. Ford (*rising with difficulty, her agitation growing*): And his wife? What about his trollop of a wife?

Donagh: The whole brood and tribe of them went a month back.

Agnes: Did not Donagh tell you that you were back in your own place again? (*Mrs. Ford moves about, a consciousness of her surroundings breaking upon her. She goes to room door, pushing it open.*)

Hugh: It is all coming back to her again.

Donagh: She was only a little upset in her mind.

Mrs. Ford (*coming from room door*): Agnes, and you, Hugh Deely, come here until I be telling you a thing of great wonder. It was in this house Donagh there was born. And it was in that room that we laid out his little sister, Mary. I remember the March day and the yellow flowers they put around her in the bed. She had no strength for the rough world. I crossed her little white hands on the breast where the life died in her like a flame. Donagh, my son, it was nearly all going from my mind.

Agnes: This is no day for sad thoughts. Think of the great thing it is for you to be back here again.

Mrs. Ford: Ah, that's the truth, girl. Did the world ever hear of such a story as an old woman like me to be standing in this place and the planter gone from Currabane! And if Donagh Ford is gone to his rest his son is here to answer for him.

Donagh: The world knows I can never be the man my father was.

Mrs. Ford (*raising her stick with a little cry*): Ah-ha, the people saw the great strength of Donagh Ford. 'They talk of a tenant at will,' he'd say, 'but who is it that can chain the purpose of a man's mind.' And they all saw it. There was no great spirit in the country when Donagh Ford took the courage of his own heart and called the people together.

Hugh: This place was a place of great strife then.

Mrs. Ford: God send, Agnes Deely, that you'll never have the memory of a bitter eviction burned into your mind.

Donagh: That's all over and done now, mother. There is a new life before you.

Mrs. Ford: Well, they had their way and

put us across the threshold. But if they did it was on this hearth was kindled a blaze that swept the townland and wrapped the country. It went from one place to another and no wave that rose upon the Shannon could hold it back. It was a thing that no power could check, for it ran in the blood and only wasted in the vein of the father to leap fresh in the heart of the son. Ah, I will go on my knees and kiss the threshold of this house for the things it calls to mind. (*She goes to door, kneeling down and kissing the threshold.*)

Hugh: It is a great hold she has on the old days and a great spirit. (*A low murmur of voices is heard in the distance outside.*)

Donagh: They are turning the ploughs into the second field.

Mrs. Ford: What's that you say about the ploughs?

Donagh (*going to her*): The boys are breaking up the land for us. (*He and Hugh help her to rise. They are all grouped at the door.*)

Agnes: It was they who cheered you on the road.

Mrs. Ford: The sight is failing me,

Donagh. I can only make out little dark spots against the green of the fields.

Donagh: Those are the people, mother.

Mrs. Ford (*crossing to fireplace*): The people are beginning to gather behind the ploughs again. Tell me, Donagh, what way is the wind coming?

Donagh: It is coming up from the South.

Mrs. Ford (*speaking more to herself*): Well, I can ask no more now. The wind is from the South and it will bear that cheer past where HE is lying in Gurteen-na-Marbh. It is a kind wind and it carries good music. Take my word for it every sound that goes on the wind is not lost to the dead.

Hugh: You ought to take her out of these thoughts.

Agnes: Leave her with me for a little while. (*Hugh and Donagh move to door.*)

Mrs. Ford: Where are you going, Donagh?

Donagh: Down to the people breaking the ground. They will be waiting for word of your home-coming.

Mrs. Ford: Ah, sure you ought to have the people up here, *a mhic*. I'd like to see all the old neighbours about me and hear the music of their voices.

Hugh: Very well. I'll step down and bid them up. (*He goes.*)

Mrs. Ford: You'll have the anxiety of the farm on your mind from this out, Donagh.

Donagh: Well, it is not the hut, with the hunger of the bog about it, that I will be bringing Agnes into now.

Mrs. Ford: Agnes, come here, love, until I look upon the sweetness of your face. (*Agnes goes to her, kneeling by her side.*) You'll be in this place with Donagh. It is a great inheritance you will have in the name of Donagh Ford. It is no idle name that will be in this house but the name of one who knew a great strength. It will be a long line of generations that the name of the Fords will reach out to, generations reaching to the time that Ireland herself will rise by the power of her own will.

Agnes (*rising*): You will only sadden yourself by these thoughts. Think of what there is in store for you.

Mrs. Ford: I'm an old woman now, child. There can be no fresh life before me. But I can tell you that I was young and full of courage once. I was the woman who stood by the side of Donagh Ford, that gave him support in the day of trial, that

was always the strong branch in the storm and in the calm. Am I saying any word only what is a true word, Donagh?

Donagh: The truth of that is well known to the people (*He goes to door.*)

Mrs. Ford: Very well. Gather up all the people now, son. Let them come in about this place for many of them have a memory of it. Let me hear the welcome of their voices. They will have good words to say, speaking on the greatness of Donagh Ford who is dead.

Donagh: They are coming out from the fields with Hugh, mother. I see the young fellows falling into line. They are wearing their caps and sashes and they have the band. I can see them carrying the banner to the front of the crowd. Here they are marching up the road. (*The strains of a fife and drum band playing a spirited march are heard in the distance. Mrs. Ford rises slowly, "humouring" the march with her stick, her face expressing her delight. The band stops.*)

Mrs. Ford: That's the spirit of Carrabane. Let the people now look upon me in this place and let them take pride in my son.

Donagh: I see Stephen Mac Donagh.

Mrs. Ford: Let him be the first across the threshold, for he went to jail with Donagh Ford. Have beside him Murt Cooney that lost his sight at the struggle of Ballyadams. Let him lift up his poor blind face till I see the rapture of it.

Donagh: Murt Cooney is coming, and Francis Kilroy and Brian Mulkearn.

Mrs. Ford: It was they who put a seal of silence on their lips and bore their punishment to save a friend of the people. Have a place beside me for the widow of Con Rafferty who hid the smoking revolver the day the tyrant fell at the cross of Killbrack.

Donagh: All the old neighbours are coming surely.

Mrs. Ford (*crossing slowly to door, Agnes going before her*): Let me look into their eyes for the things I will see stirring there. I will reach them out the friendship of my hands and speak to them the words that lie upon my heart. The rafters of this house will ring again with the voices that Donagh Ford welcomed and that I loved. Aye, the very fire on the hearth will leap in memory of the hands that tended it.

Donagh: This will be such a day as will

be made a boast of for ever in Carrabane. (*Agnes goes out door to meet the people.*)

Mrs. Ford: Let there be music and the sound of rejoicing and shouts from the hills. Let those who put their feet in anger upon us and who are themselves reduced to-day look back upon the strength they held and the power they lost.

Donagh: I will bid the music play up. (*He goes out.*)

Mrs. Ford (*standing alone at the door*): People of Carrabane, gather about the old house of Donagh Ford. Let the fight for the land in this place end where it began. Let the courage and the strength that Donagh Ford knew be in your blood from this day out. Let the spirit be good and the hand be strong for the work that the heart directs. Raise up your voices with my voice this day and let us make a great praise on the name of Ireland. (*She raises her stick, straightening her old figure. The band strikes up and the people cheer outside as the curtain falls.*)

A WAYSIDE BURIAL

THE parish priest was in a very great hurry and yet anxious for a talk on his pet subject. He wanted to speak about the new temperance hall. Would I mind walking a little way with him while he did so? He had a great many things to attend to that day. . . . We made our way along the street together, left the town behind us, and presently reached that sinister appendage of all Irish country towns, the workhouse. The priest turned in the wide gate, and the porter, old, official, spectacled, came to meet him.

"Has the funeral gone?" asked the priest, a little breathless.

"I'll see, Father." The porter shuffled over the flags, a great door swung open; there was a vista of whitewashed walls, a chilly, vacant corridor, and beyond it a hall where old men were seated on forms at a long, white deal table. They were eating—a silent, grey, bent, beaten group. Through a glass partition we could see the porter in

his office turning over the leaves of a great register.

"I find," he said, coming out again, speaking as if he were giving evidence at a sworn inquiry, "that the remains of Martin Quirke, deceased, were removed at 4.15."

"I am more than half an hour late," said the priest, regarding his watch with some irritation.

We hurried out and along the road to the country, the priest trailing his umbrella behind him, speaking of the temperance hall but preoccupied about the funeral he had missed, my eyes marking the flight of flocks of starlings making westward.

Less than a mile of ground brought us to the spot where the paupers were buried. It lay behind a high wall, a narrow strip of ground, cut off from a great lord's demesne by a wood. The scent of decay was heavy in the place; it felt as if the spring and the summer had dragged their steps here, to lie down and die with the paupers. The uncut grass lay rank and grey and long—Nature's unkempt beard—on the earth. The great bare chestnuts and oaks threw narrow shadows over the irregular mounds of earth. Small, rude wooden

crosses stood at the heads of some of the mounds, lopsided, drunken, weather-beaten. No names were inscribed upon them. All the bones laid down here were anonymous. A robin was singing at the edge of the wood; overhead the rapid wings of wild pigeons beat the air.

A stable bell rang impetuously in the distance, dismissing the workmen on the lord's demesne. By a freshly-made grave two gravediggers were leaning on their spades. They were paupers, too; men who got some privilege for their efforts in this dark strip of earth between the wood and the wall. One of them yawned. A third man stood aloof, a minor official from the workhouse; he took a pipe from his mouth as the priest approached.

The three men gave one the feeling that they were rather tired of waiting, impatient to have their little business through. It was a weird spot in the gathering gloom of a November evening. The only bright thing in the place, the only gay spot, the only cheerful patch of colour, almost exulting in its grim surroundings, was the heap of freshly thrown up soil from the grave. It was rich in colour as newly-coined gold.

Resting upon it was a clean, white, unpainted coffin. The only ornament was a tin breastplate on the lid and the inscription in black letters :

Martin Quirke,
Died November 3, 1900.
R.I.P.

The white coffin on the pile of golden earth was like the altar of some pagan god. I stood apart as the priest, vesting himself in a black stole, approached the graveside and began the recital of the burial service in Latin. The gravediggers, whose own bones would one day be interred anonymously in the same ground, stood on either side of him with their spades, two grim acolytes. The minor official from the workhouse, the symbol of the State, bared a long, narrow head, as white and as smooth as the coffin on the heap of earth. I stood by a groggy wooden cross, the eternal observer.

The priest spoke in a low monotone, holding the book close to his eyes in the uncertain light. And as he read I fell to wondering who our brother in the white coffin might be. Some merry tramp who knew the pain and the joy of the road?

Some detached soul who had shaken off the burden of life's conventions, one who loved lightly and took punishment casually? One who saw crime as a science, or merely a broken reed? Or a soldier who had carried a knapsack in foreign campaigns? A creature of empire who had found himself in Africa, or Egypt, or India, or the Crimea, and come back again to claim his pile of golden earth in the corner of the lord's demesne? If the men had time, perhaps they would stick a little wooden cross over the spot where his bones were laid down. . . .

The priest's voice continued the recitation of the burial service and the robin sang at the edge of the dim wood. Down the narrow strip of rank burial ground a low wind cried, and the light, losing its glow in the western sky, threw a grey pall on the grass. And under the influence of the moment a little memory of people I had known and forgotten went across my mind, a memory that seemed to stir in the low wind, a memory of people who had at the last got their white, clean coffin and their rest on a pile of golden earth, people who had gone like our brother in the deal

boards. . . . There was the man, the scholar, who had taught his school, who had an intelligence, who could talk, who, perhaps, could have written only——. The wind sobbed down the narrow strip of ground. . . . He had made his battle, indeed, a long-drawn-out battle, for he had only given way step by step, gradually but inexorably yielding ground to the thing that was hunting him out of civilised life. He had gone from his school, his home, his friends, fleeing from one miserable refuge to another in the miserable country town. Eventually he had passed in through the gates of the workhouse. It was all very vivid now—his attempts to get back to the life he had known, like a man struggling in the quicksands. There were the little spurts back to the town, the well-shaped head, the face which still held some remembrance of its distinction and its manhood erect over the quaking, broken frame; that splendid head like a noble piece of sculpture on the summit of a crumbling ruin. Forth he would come, the flicker of resistance, a pallid battle-light in the eyes, a vessel that had been all but wrecked once more standing up the harbour to meet the winds that

had driven it from the seas—and after a little battle once more taking in the sheets and crawling back to the anchorage of the dark workhouse, there to suffer in the old way, in secret to curse, to pray, to despair, to hope, to contrive some little repairs to the broken physique in order that there might be yet another journey into waters that were getting more and more shadowy. And the day came when the only journey that could be made was a shuffle to the gate, the haunted eyes staring into a world which was a nightmare of regrets. How terrible was the pathos of that life, that struggle, that tragedy, how poignant its memory while the robin sang at the edge of the dim wood! . . . And there was that red-haired, defiant young man with the build of an athlete, the eyes of an animal. How bravely he could sing up the same road to the dark house! It was to him as the burrow is to the rabbit. He would come out to nibble at the regular and lawful intervals, and having nibbled return to sleep and shout and fight for his " rights " in the dark house. And once, on a spring day, he had come out with a companion, a pale woman in a thin shawl and a drab skirt, and

they had taken to the roads together, himself swinging his ashplant, his stride and manner carrying the illusion of purpose, his eyes on everything and his mind nowhere; herself trotting over the broken stones in her canvas shoes beside him, a pale shadow under the fire of his red head. They had gone away into a road whose milestones were dark houses, himself singing the song of his own life, a song of mumbled words, without air or music; herself silent, clutching her thin shawl over her breast, her feet pattering over the little stones of the road. . . . The wind whistled down over the graves, by the wooden crosses. . . . There was that little woman who at the close of the day, when the light was charitable in its obscurity, opened her door and came down from the threshold of her house, painfully as if she were descending from a great height. Nobody was about. All was quietness in the quiet street. And she drew the door to, put the key in the lock, her hand trembled, the lock clicked! The deed was done! Who but herself could know that the click of the key in the lock was the end, the close, the dreadful culmination of the best part of a whole century of struggle,

of life? Behind that door she had swept up a bundle of memories that were now all an agony because the key had clicked in the lock. Behind the door was the story of her life and the lives of her children and her children's children. Where was the use, she might have asked, of blaming any of them now? What was it that they had all gone, all scattered, leaving her broken there at the last? Had not the key clicked in the lock? In that click was the end of it all; in the empty house were the ghosts of her girlhood, her womanhood, her motherhood, her old age, her struggles, her successes, her skill in running her little shop, her courage in riding one family squall after another! The key had clicked in the lock. She moved down the quiet street, sensitive lest the eye of the neighbours should see her, a tottering, broken thing going by the vague walls, keeping to the back streets, setting out for the dark house beyond the town. She had said to them, "I will be no trouble to you." And, indeed, she was not. They had little more to do for her than join her hands over her breast. . . . The wind was plaintive in the gaunt trees of the dark wood. . . . Which of us could say he would never turn

a key in the lock of an empty house? How many casual little twists of the wrist of Fate stand between the best of us and the step down from the threshold of a broken home? What rags of memories have any of us to bundle behind the door of the empty house when the hour comes for us to click the key in the lock? . . . The wind cried down the narrow strip of ground where the smell of decay was in the grass.

There was a movement beside the white coffin, the men were lifting it off the golden pile of earth and lowering it into the dark pit. The men's feet slipped and shuffled for a foothold in the yielding clay. At last a low, dull thud sounded up from the mouth of the pit. Our brother in the white coffin had at last found a lasting tenure in the soil.

The official from the dark house moved over to me. He spoke in whispers, holding the hat an official inch of respect for the dead above the narrow white shred of his skull.

"Martin Quirke they are burying," he said.

"Who was he?"

"Didn't you ever hear tell of Martin Quirke?"

"No, never."

"A big man he was one time, with his acres around him and his splendid place. Very proud people they were—he and his brother—and very hot, too. The Quirkes of Ballinadee."

"And now ——"

I did not finish the sentence. The priest was spraying the coffin in the grave with the golden earth.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust." It fell briskly on the shallow deal timber.

"'Twas the land agitation, the fight for the land, that brought Martin Quirke down," said the official as the earth sprayed the pauper's coffin. "He was one of the first to go out under the Plan of Campaign—the time of the evictions. They never got back their place. When the settlement came the Quirkes were broken. Martin lost his spirit and his heart. Drink it was that got him in the end, and now——"

"Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis," the priest's voice said.

"All the same," said the official, "it was men like Martin Quirke who broke the

back of landlordism. He was strong and he was weak. God rest him!"

I walked away over the uneven ground, the memory of the land agitation, its bitterness and its passion, oppressing me. Stories of things such as this stalked the country like ghosts.

The priest overtook me, and we turned to leave. Down the narrow strip of the lord's demesne were the little pauper mounds, like narrow boxes wrapped in the long grey grass. Their pathos was almost vibrant in the dim November light. And away beyond them were a series of great heaps, looking like broad billows out to sea. The priest stood for a moment.

"You see the great mounds at the end?" he asked. "They are the Famine Pits."

"The Famine Pits?"

"Yes; the place where the people were buried in heaps and hundreds, in thousands, during the Famine of '46 and '47. They died like flies by the roadside. You see such places in almost every part of Ireland. I hope the people will never again die like that—die gnawing the gravel on the roadside."

The rusty iron gate in the demesne wall swung open and we passed out.

THE GRAY LAKE

can see every colour in the water except gray," said the lady who was something of a sceptic.

"That," said the humorist, tilting back his straw hat, "is the very reason they call it the Gray Lake. The world bristles with misnomers."

"Which explains," said the lady sceptic, "why they call Eamonn a *seannachie*."

"Hi!" called out the humorist. "Do you hear that, Eamonn?"

"*Cad tá ort*?" asked Eamonn. He had been leaning out over the prow of the boat, looking vaguely into the water, and now turned round. Eamonn was always asking people, "*Cad tá ort*?" and before they had time to answer he was saying, or thinking, something else.

"Why do they call this the Gray Lake?" asked the lady sceptic. "It never looked really gray, did it?"

"Of course it did," said Eamonn. "The first man who ever saw it beheld it in the gray light of dawn, and so he called it

Baile Loch Riabhach, the Town of the Gray Lough."

"When might that be?" asked the lady sceptic drily.

"The morning after the town was drowned," said Eamonn.

"What town?"

"The town we are now rowing over."

"Good heavens! Is there a town beneath us?"

"*Seadh*," said Eamonn. "Just now I was trying if I could see anything of the ruins at the bottom of the lake."

"And you did, of course."

"I think so."

"What did you see?"

"Confusion and the vague, glimmering gable of a house or two. Then the oars splashed and the water became dense."

"But tell us how the town came to be at the bottom of the lake," said the man who rowed, shipping his oars. The boat rocked in the quick wash of the waves. The water was warming in vivid colours under the glow of the sunset. Eamonn leaned back in his seat at the prow of the boat. His eyes wandered away over the water to the slope of meadows, the rise of hills.

"*Anois, Eamonn*," said the lady sceptic, still a little drily. "The story!"

Long and long ago, said Eamonn, there was a sleepy old town lying snug in the dip of a valley. It was famous for seven of the purest springs of water which ever sparkled in the earth. They called it the Seven Sisters. Round the springs they built an immense and costly well. Over the well was a great leaden lid of extraordinary weight, and by a certain mechanical device this lid was closed on the well every evening at sundown. The springs became abnormally active between sundown and sunrise, so that there was always a danger that they might flood the valley and destroy the people. As security against this the citizens had built the great well with its monster lid, and each evening the lid was locked over the well by means of a secret lock and a secret key.

The most famous person in the town of the Seven Sisters was the Keeper of the Key. He was a man of dignified bearing, important airs, wearing white silk knee-breeches, a green swallow-tail coat, and a cocked hat. On the sleeve of his coat was

embroidered in gold the image of a key and seven sprays of water. He had great privileges and authority, and could condemn or reprieve any sort of criminal except, of course, a sheep stealer. He lived in a mansion beside the town, and this mansion was almost as famous as the seven famous springs. People travelled from far places to see it. A flight of green marble steps led to a broad door of oak. On the broad oaken door he had fashioned one of the most remarkable knockers and the most beautiful door knob that were known to Europe. Both were of beaten gold. The knocker was wrought in the shape of a key. The door knob was a group of seven water nymphs. A sensation was created which agitated all Ireland when this work of art was completed by five of the foremost goldsmiths in the land. The Keeper of the Key of the Seven Sisters issued a Proclamation declaring that there was a flaw in the rounding of one of the ankles of the group of seven water nymphs. He had the five goldsmiths suddenly arrested and put on their trial. "The Gael," said the Keeper of the Key, "must be pure-blooded in his art. I am of the Clann Gael. I shall not allow any half-

artist to come to my door, there work under false pretence and go unpunished." The goldsmiths protested that their work was the work of artists and flawless as the design. Not another word would they be allowed to speak. Bards and artists, scholars and men skilled in controversy, flocked from all parts to see the door knob. A terrible controversy ensued. Sides were taken, some for, others against, the ankle of the water nymph. They came to be known as the Ankleites and the anti-Ankleites. And in that tremendous controversy the Keeper of the Key proved the masterly manner of man he was. He had the five goldsmiths convicted for failure as supreme artists, and they were sentenced to banishment from the country. On their way from the shore to the ship that was to bear them away their curragh sprang a sudden leak, and they were all drowned. That was the melancholy end of the five chief goldsmiths of Eirinn.

Every morning at daybreak trumpets were blown outside the mansion of the Keeper of the Key. The gates of a court-yard swung open and out marched an armed guard, men in saffron kilts, bearing

spears and swords. They formed up before the flight of marble steps. A second fanfare of the trumpets, and back swung the great oaken door, disclosing the Keeper of the Key in his bright silks and cocked hat. Out he would come on the doorstep, no attendants by him, and pulling to the great door by the famous knob he would descend the marble steps, the guard would take up position, and, thus escorted, he would cross the drawbridge of the moat and enter the town of the Seven Sisters, marching through the streets to the great well. People would have gathered there even at that early hour, women bearing vessels to secure their supply of the water, which, it was said, had an especial virtue when taken at the break of day. No mortal was allowed nearer than fifty yards to the well while the Keeper proceeded to unlock the lid. His guard would stand about, and with a haughty air he would approach the well solus. The people would see him make some movements, and back would slide the enormous lid. A blow on the trumpets proclaimed that the well was open, and the people would approach it, laughing and chattering, and the Keeper of the Key would march back to his man-

sion in the same military order, ascend the steps, push open the great door, and the routine of daily life would ensue. For the closing of the well at sundown a similar ceremony was observed. The only additional incident was the marching of a crier through the streets, beating great wooden clappers, and standing at each street corner calling out in a loud voice: "Hear ye people that the lock is on the Seven Sisters. All's well!"

In those days there was a saying among the people which was in common usage all over Ireland. When a man became possessed of any article or property to which he had a doubtful title his neighbours said, with a significant wag of the head, "He got it where the Keeper gets the Key." This saying arose out of a mysterious thing in the life of the Keeper of the Key. Nobody ever saw the secret key. It was not in his hands when he came forth from the mansion morning and evening to fulfil his great office. He did not carry it in his pockets, for the simple reason that he had had no pockets. He kept no safe nor secret panel nor any private drawer in his mansion that the most observant among his retainers

could espy. Yet that there was a secret key, and that it was inserted in a lock, anybody could see for himself, even at a distance of fifty yards, twice a day at the well. It was as if at that moment the key came into his hand out of the air and again vanished into air when the proper business was over. Indeed, there were people of even those remote and enlightened days who attributed some wizardy to the Keeper of the Key. It added to the awe in which he was held and to the sense of security which the proceedings of his whole life inspired in his fellow-citizens. Nevertheless had the Keeper of the Key his enemies. A man of distinction and power can no more tread the paths of his ambitions without stirring up rivalries and hostilities than can the winds howl across the earth and leave the dust on the roads undisturbed. The man who assumes power will always, sooner or later, have his power to hold put to the test. So it was with the Keeper of the Key. There were people who nursed the ambition of laying hands on the secret key. That secured, they would be lords of the town of the Seven Sisters. The reign of the great Keeper would be over. His

instinct told him that these dangers were always about. He was on the alert. He had discovered treachery even within the moat of his own keep. His servants and guards had been tampered with. But all the attempts upon his key and his power had been in vain. He kept to the grand unbroken simplicity of his masterly routine. He had crushed his enemies whenever they had arisen. "One who has survived the passions of Ireland's poets," he would say —for the poets had all been Ankleites—" is not likely to bow the knee before snivelling little thieves." A deputation which had come to him proposing that the well should be managed by a constitutional committee of the citizens was flogged by the guards across the drawbridge. The leader of this deputation was a deformed tailor, who soon after planned an audacious attack on the mansion of the Keeper of the Key. The Keeper, his guards, servants and retainers were all one night secretly drugged and for several hours of the night lay unconscious in the mansion. Into it swarmed the little tailor and his constitutional committee; they pulled the whole interior to pieces in search of the key. The very pillows under the

head of the Keeper had been stabbed and ransacked. It was nearing daybreak when the Keeper awoke, groggy from the effects of the narcotic. The guard was roused. The whole place was in confusion. The robbers had fled, leaving the great golden knocker on the door hanging from its position; they were removing it when surprised. The nymphs were untouched. The voice of the Keeper of the Key was deliberate, authoritative, commanding, amid the confusion. The legs of the guards quaked beneath them, their heads swam, and they said to each other, "Now surely is the key gone!" But their master hurried them to their morning duty, and they escorted him to the well a little beyond daybreak, and, lo, at the psychological moment, there was the key and back rolled the lid from the precious well. "Surely," they said, "this man is blessed, for the key comes to him as a gift from Heaven. The robbers of the earth are powerless against him." When the citizens of the Seven Sisters heard of what had taken place in the evil hours of the night they poured across the drawbridge from the town and acclaimed the Keeper of the Key before his

mansion. He came out on the watch tower, his daughter by his side, and with dignified mien acknowledged the acclamations of the citizens. And before he put the lid on the well that night the deformed tailor and his pards were all dragged through the streets of the Seven Sisters and cast into prison.

Never was the popularity of the Keeper at so high a level as after this episode. They would have declared him the most perfect as the most powerful of men were it not for one little spot on the bright sun of his fame. They did not like his domestic habits. The daughter who stood by his side on the watch tower was a young girl of charm, a fair, frail maiden, a slender lily under the towering shadow of her dark father. The citizens did not, perhaps, understand his instincts of paternity; and, indeed, if they understood them they would not have given them the sanction of their approval. The people only saw that the young girl, his only child, was condemned to what they called a life of virtual imprisonment in the mansion. She was a warm-blooded young creature, and like all warm-blooded creatures, inclined tc gaiety of spirits, to impulsive friendships

to a joyous and engaging frankness. These traits, the people saw, the father disapproved of and checked, and the young girl was regarded with great pity. "Ah," they would say, "he is a wonderful Keeper of the Key, but, alas, how harsh a father!" He would not allow the girl any individual freedom; she was under eternal escort when abroad; she was denied the society of those of her years; she was a flower whose fragrance it was not the privilege of the people to enjoy. It may be that the people, in murmuring against all this, did not make sufficient allowance for the circumstances of the life of the Keeper of the Key. He was alone, he stood apart from all men. His only passion in life had been the strict guardianship of a trust. In these circumstances his affections for his only child were direct and crude and, too, maybe a little unconsciously harsh. His love for his child was the love of the oyster for its pearl. The people saw nothing but the rough, tight shells which closed about the treasure in the mansion of the Keeper of the Key. More than one considerable wooer had approached that mansion, laying claim to the pearl which it held. All were met with

the same terrible dark scowl and sent about their business. "You, sir," the Keeper of the Key would say, "come to my door, knock upon my knocker, lay hands upon my door knob—my golden door knob—and ask for my daughter's hand! Sir, your audacity is your only excuse. Let it also be your defence against my wrath. Now, sir, a very good day!" And when the citizens heard that yet another gallant wooer had come and been dismissed they would say, "The poor child, the poor child, what a pity!"

The truth was that the daughter of the Keeper of the Key was not in the least unhappy. She had a tremendous opinion of her father; she lavished upon him all the warm affection of her young ardour. She reigned like a young queen within the confines of her home. She was about the gardens and the grounds all day, as joyous as a bird. Once or twice her governess gave her some inkling as to the suitors who came to the mansion requesting her hand, for that is an affair that cannot be kept from the most jealously-guarded damsel. The governess had a sense of humour and entertained the girl with accounts of the manner

of lovers who, as she put it, washed up the marble steps of the mansion to the oak door, like waves on a shore, and were sent back again into the ocean of rejections. The young girl was much amused and secretly flattered at these events. "Ah," she would say, in a little burst of rapture, "how splendid is my father!" The pearl rejoices in the power of the oyster to shut it away from the world.

Now (continued Eamonn), on the hilly slopes of the country called Sunnach there was a shepherd boy, and people who saw that he was a rare boy in looks and intelligence were filled with pity for his unhappy lot. The bodach for whom he herded was a dour, ill-conditioned fellow, full of curses and violent threats, but the boy was content in the life of the hillsides, and troubled very little about the bodach's dour looks. "Some day," he would say to himself laughingly, "I will compose terrible verses about his black mouth." One day the shepherd boy drove a little flock of the bodach's lively sheep to the fair in the town of the Seven Sisters. As he passed the mansion of the Keeper of the Key he cried out, "How up! how up! how up!" His

voice was clear and full, the notes as round and sweet as the voice of the cuckoo. The daughter of the Keeper of the Key was seated by a window painting a little picture when she heard the "How up!" of the shepherd's voice. "What beautiful calls!" she exclaimed, and leaned out from the window. At the same moment the shepherd boy looked up. He was bare-headed and wore his plaids. His head was a shock of curly straw-coloured hair, his face eager, clear-cut, his eyes golden-brown and bright as the eyes of a bird. He smiled and the damsel smiled. "How up! how up! how up!" he sang out joyously to his flock as he moved down to the fair. The damsel went back to her little picture and sat there for some time staring at her palette and mixing the wrong colours.

That evening the Keeper of the Key, as was his custom, escorted his daughter on his arm, servants before and behind them, through the town of the Seven Sisters, viewing such sights of the fair as were agreeable and doing a little shopping. The people, seeing the great man coming, made way for him on the paths, and bowed and smiled to him as he passed. He walked with great

dignity, and his daughter's beauty made the bystanders say, "Happy will it be for the lucky man!" Among those they encountered was the shepherd boy, and he gazed upon the damsel with rapture in his young eyes. He followed them about the town at a respectful distance, and back to their mansion. The shepherd boy did not return to the hilly country called Sunnach that night, nor the next night, nor for many a long day and night. He remained in the town of the Seven Sisters, running on errants, driving carts, doing such odd jobs as came his way, and all because he wanted to gaze upon the daughter of the Keeper of the Key. In the evening he would go by the mansion singing out, "How up! how up! how up!" as if he were driving flocks past. And in the window he would see the wave of a white hand. He would go home, then, to his little back room in the lodging-house, and there stay up very late at night, writing, in the candle-light, verses to the damsel. One Song of the Shepherd Boy to his Lady has survived:

Farewell to the sweet reed I tuned on the hill,
My grief for the rough slopes of Sunnach so still,
The wind in the fir tree and bleat of the ewe
Are lost in the wild cry my heart makes for you.
The brown floors I danced on, the sheds where I lay,
Are gone from my mind like a wing in the bay:
Dear lady, I'd herd the wild swans in the skies
If they knew of lake water as blue as your eyes!

Well, it was not very long, as you can imagine, until the Keeper of the Key observed the shepherd boy loitering about the mansion. When he heard him calling past the house to imaginary flocks a scowl came upon his face. "Ah-ha!" he said, "another conspiracy! Last time it was a hunchback tailor. This time they come from the country. They signal by the cries of shepherds. Well, I shall do the driving for them!" There and then he had the

shepherd boy apprehended, bound, and put in a cell. In due course he was accused and sentenced, like the famous goldsmiths, to banishment from Eirinn. When the daughter of the Keeper heard what had come to pass she was filled with grief. She appeared before her father for the first time with tears in her eyes and woe in her face. He was greatly moved, and seated the girl by his side. She knelt by his knee and confessed to the whole affair with the shepherd boy. The Keeper of the Key was a little relieved to learn that his suspicions of a fresh conspiracy were unfounded, but filled with indignation that such a person as a shepherd should not alone aspire to but win the heart of his daughter. "What have we come to," he said, "when a wild thing from the hills of Sunnach comes down and dares to lay his hand on the all but perfect water nymphs on the golden knob of my door! Justice shall be done. The order of banishment is set aside. Let this wild hare of the hills, this mountain rover, be taken and seven times publicly dipped in the well. I guarantee that will cool him! He shall then have until break of day to clear out of my town. Let him away back

to the swine on the hills." The girl pleaded that the boy might be spared the frightful indignity of a public dipping in the well of the Seven Sisters, but her father was implacable. "Have I not spoken?" he said sternly, and the damsel was led away by her governess in tears.

The people flocked to the well as they might to a Feis to see the dipping of the shepherd boy. Cries of merriment arose among them when the boy, bound in strips of hide, was lowered by the servants of the Keeper of the Key into the mouth of the great well. It was a cold, dark, creepy place down in the shaft of the well, the walls reeking, covered with slimy green lichen, the waters roaring. The shepherd boy closed his eyes and gave himself up for lost. But the Seven Sisters of the well kept moving down as fast as the servants told out the rope, until at last they could not lower him any farther. The servants danced the rope up and down seven times, and the people screamed and clapped their hands, crying out, "All those who write love verses come to a bad end!" But the poet was never yet born who had not a friend greater than all his enemies. At that

moment the spirits of the Seven Sisters rose out of the water and spoke to the shepherd boy.

"O shepherd boy," they said, "the Keeper of the Key is also our enemy. We were created for something better than this narrow shaft. We cry out in bitter pain the long hours of the night."

"Why do you cry out in bitter pain?" asked the shepherd boy.

"Because," said the spirits of the Seven Sisters, "we want to leap out of this cold place to meet our lover, the moon. Every night he comes calling to us and we dare not respond. We are locked away under the heavy lid. We can never gather our full strength to burst our way to liberty. We dream of the pleasant valley. We want to get out into it, to make merry about the trees, to sport in the warm places, to lip the edge of the green meadows, to water pleasant gardens. We want to see the flowers, to flash in the sun, to dance under the spread of great branches, to make snug, secret places for the pike and the otter, to pile up the coloured pebbles, and hear the water-hen splashing in the rushes. And above all, we want to meet our lover, the

moon, to roll about in his beams, to reach for his kiss in the harvest nights. O shepherd boy, take us from our prison well!"

"O Seven Sisters," asked the shepherd boy, "how can I do this for you?"

"Secure the secret key," they said. "Open the lid while we are at our full strength in the night."

"Alas," said the shepherd boy, "that I cannot do. The Keeper has made of it a magic thing."

"We know his great secret," said the spirits of the Seven Sisters. "Swear to set us free and we shall tell you the secret of the key."

"And what reward shall I have?" asked the shepherd boy.

"You shall have the hand of the daughter of the Keeper of the Key, the Lady of your Songs," they said. "Take her back to the hills where you were so happy. We shall spare you when we are abroad."

"Then," said the shepherd boy, "I swear to release you."

"The Keeper of the Key," said the spirits of the Seven Sisters, "has a devil lurking behind the fine manners of his body. In secret he laughs at the people. He has

the blood of the five goldsmiths on his hands. It was by his connivance the curragh sprang a leak, and that they were drowned. They were true artists, of the spirit of the Gael. But they alone knew his secret, and he made away with them before they could speak. His great controversy on the water nymphs was like a spell cast over the minds of the people to cover his crime."

"What a demon!" cried the shepherd boy.

"The key of the well," said the spirits of the Seven Sisters, "is concealed in the great golden knob of the oaken door, and upon that has concentrated the greatest public scrutiny which has ever beaten upon a door-knob in the story of the whole world. Such has been the craft of the Keeper of the Key! When he comes out in the morning and evening, and while drawing the door after him, he puts a finger on the third toe of the fourth water nymph. This he presses three times, quick as a pulse-beat, and, lo, a hidden spring is released and shoots the key into the loose sleeve of his coat. On returning he puts his hand on the golden knob, presses the second toe of the third water nymph, and the key slides

back into its hidden cavity. This secret was alone known to the goldsmiths. They went to the bottom of the sea with it. In this way has the Keeper of the Key held his power and defied his enemies. When the scholars were making epigrams and the bards warming into great cadences on the art of the ankle of the water nymph, this Keeper of the Key would retire to his watch-tower and roll about in secret merriment."

"What a fiend!" cried the shepherd boy.

"He had caused to be painted in his room a scroll surrounded by illuminated keys and nymphs and tumbling cascades, and bearing the words, 'Let us praise the art which conceals art; but let us love the art which conceals power.'"

"What a monster!" cried the shepherd boy.

"In this way," said the spirits of the Seven Sisters, "has he lived. In this way has he been able to keep us from our freedom, our lover. O shepherd boy——"

Before another word could be spoken the shepherd boy was drawn up on the rope. The water rose with him and lapped lightly over his person so that he might seem as if he had been plunged deeply into the well.

When he was drawn up to the side of the well the shepherd boy lay on the ground, his eyes closed, feigning great distress. The people again clapped their hands, and some cried out, "Now little water rat, make us a new verse!" But others murmured in pity, and an old peasant woman, in a Breedeen cloak, hobbled to his side and smoothed back his locks. At the touch of her soft hands the shepherd boy opened his eyes, and he saw it was the daughter of the Keeper of the Key disguised. With the connivance of her governess, she had escaped from the mansion as an old peasant woman in a cloak. The shepherd boy secretly kissed her little palms and whispered, "I must come to you at midnight. As you value your life have the guards taken from the outer door, only for two minutes. Make some pretext. I will give the shepherd's call and then you must act. Do not fail me."

Before more could be said the servants roughly bundled the old peasant woman aside, carried the shepherd boy to his lodgings, and there threw him on his bed. "Remember," they said, "that you remain

within the walls of the town of the Seven Sisters after break of day at your peril."

At midnight the shepherd boy arose and approached the mansion of the Keeper of the Key. He could see the two grim guards, one each side of the oaken door. Standing some way off he gave the shepherd's call, making his voice sound like the hoot of an owl. In a little time he saw the guards move away from the door; they went to a side entrance in the courtyard, and presently he could hear them laughing, as if some entertainment was being provided for them; then measures were passed through the iron bars of the gate to them, and these they raised to their lips. At this the shepherd boy ran swiftly up the steps, approached the door, and pressed three times, quick as a pulse-beat, the third toe of the fourth water nymph, and immediately from a secret cavity in the knob a curious little golden key was shot forth. This the shepherd boy seized, flew down the steps, and scaled over the town wall. He ran to the great well and stooped over the lid. He could hear the Seven Sisters twisting and worming and striving beneath it, little cries of pain breaking from them.

Overhead the moon was shining down on the well.

"O Seven Sisters," said the Shepherd boy, "I have come to give you to your lover."

He could hear a great cry of joy down in the well. He put the key in the lock, turned it, and immediately there was the gliding and slipping of one steel bar after another into an oil bath. The great lid slowly revolved, moving away from over the well. The Seven Sisters did the rest. They sprang with a peal of the most delirious laughter—laughter that was of the underground, the cavern, the deep secret places of the earth, laughter of elfs and hidden rivers—to the light of the moon. The shepherd boy could see seven distinct spiral issues of sparkling water and they took the shape of nymphs, more exquisite than anything he had ever seen even in his dreams. Something seemed to happen in the very heavens above; the moon reached down from the sky, swiftly and tenderly, and was so dazzling that the shepherd boy had to turn his face away. He knew that in the blue spaces of the firmament overhead the moon was embracing the Seven

Sisters. Then he ran, ran like the wind, for already the water was shrieking down the streets of the town. As he went he could see lights begin to jump in dark windows and sleepy people in their night attire coming to peer out into the strange radiance outside.

As he reached the drawbridge he saw that the men had already lowered it, and there was a great rustling noise and squealing; and what he took to be a drift of thick dust driven by the wind was gushing over it, making from the town. A few more yards and he saw that it was not thick brown dust, but great squads of rats flying the place. The trumpets were all blowing loud blasts when he reached the mansion of the Keeper of the Key, the guards with their spears pressing out under the arch of the courtyard, and servants coming out the doors. The great oak door flew open and he saw the Keeper of the Key, a candle in his quaking hand. A great crying could now be heard coming up from the population of the town. The water was bursting open the doors of the houses as if they were cardboard.

"O Keeper of the Key," cried the shep-

herd boy, "the Seven Sisters are abroad. I am obeying your command and returning to the swine on the hills. The despised Sunnach will be in the dreams of many to-night!"

The candle fell from the hand of the Keeper of the Key, and he could be seen in the moonlight groping for the door-knob, his hand on the figures of the group of water nymphs. In a moment he gave a low moan and, his head hanging over his breast, he staggered down the marble steps. "Alas," cried the guards, "now is the great man broken!" He made for the drawbridge crying out, "The lid, the lid. Slide it back over the well!" The guards and servants pressed after him, but not one of them ever got into the town again. Across the bridge was now pouring a wild rush of human panic. Carriages, carts, cars, horsemen, mules, donkeys, were flying from the Seven Sisters laden with men and women and whole families. Crowds pressed forward on foot. Animals, dogs, cats, pigs, sheep, cows, came pell-mell with them. Drivers stood in their seats flaying their horses as if driven by madness. The animals rolled their eyes,

snorted steam from their nostrils, strained forward with desperate zeal. Once or twice the struggling mass jammed, and men fought each other like beasts. The cries of people being trampled to death broke out in harrowing protest. For a moment the shepherd boy saw the form of a priest rise up, bearing aloft the stark outline of a cross, and then he disappeared.

Over that night of terror was the unnatural brilliance of the swoollen moon. All this the shepherd boy saw in a few eternal moments. Then he cried out, "How up! how up! how up!" and immediately the damsel tripped down the broad staircase of the mansion, dressed in white robes, her hair loose about her shoulders. Never had she looked so frail and beautiful, the lily of the valley! The shepherd boy told her what had come to pass. She cried out for her father. "I am the daughter of the Keeper of the Key," she said. "I shall stand by his side at the well in this great hour."

"I am now the master of the town of the Seven Sisters," said the shepherd boy. "I am the Keeper of the Key." And he held up the secret key.

The damsel, seeing this, and catching sight of what was taking place at the drawbridge, fell back in a swoon on the carpet of the hall. The shepherd boy raised her in his arms and fled for the hills. Along the road was the wild stampede of the people, all straining for the hills, pouring in a mad rush from the valley and the town. Behind them were the still madder, swifter, more terrible waters, coming in sudden thuds, in furious drives, eddying and sculping and rearing in an orgy of remorseless and heartrending destruction. Down before that roaring avalanche went walls and trees and buildings. The shepherd boy saw men give up the struggle for escape, cowering by the roadside, and women, turning from the race to the hills, rushed back to meet the oncoming waters with arms outspread and insanity in their wild eyes.

Not a human creature escaped that night of wroth except the shepherd boy and the damsel he carried in his arms. Every time the waters reached his heels they reared up like great white horses and fell back, thus sparing him. Three times did he look back at happenings in the town of the Seven

Sisters. The first time he looked back the water was up to the last windows of houses that were three storeys high. All the belongings of the householders were floating about, and people were sinking through the water, their lives going out as swiftly as twinkling bubbles. In an attic window he saw a young girl loosen her hair, she was singing a song, preparing to meet death as if she were making ready for a lover. A man at the top of a ladder was gulping whiskey from a bottle, and when the water sprang at his throat he went down with a mad defiant cry. A child ran out an open window, golden locks dancing about its pretty head, as if it were running into a garden. There was another little bubble in the moonlight. . . . . The second time the shepherd boy looked back the swallows were flying from their nests under the eaves of the houses, for the water was now lapping them. An old woman was hobbling across a roof on crutches. Men were drawing their bodies out of the chimney-pots. A raft on which the Keeper's guard had put out slowly, like a live thing lazily yawning and turning over on its side, sent them all into the common

doom. A man with a bag of gold clutched in his hand, stood dizzily on the high gable of a bank, then, with a scream, tottered and fell. . . . . The third time the shepherd boy looked back nothing was to be seen above the face of the water except the pinnacle of the watch tower of the mansion, and standing upon it was the Keeper of the Key, his arms outspread, his face upturned to the moon, and the seven water nymphs leaping about him in a silver dance.

After that the shepherd boy drew up on the hills with the damsel. He was quite exhausted, and he noticed that the activity of the waters gradually calmed down as daybreak approached, like things spent after a night of wild passion. When at last the day quivered into life on the eastern sky he called the damsel to his side, and standing there together they looked out over the spread of water. The town of the Seven Sisters was no more.

"Look," cried the shepherd boy, "at Loch Riabhach!" And drawing back he cast out into the far water the secret key. There it still lies under a rock, somewhere in the lake over which our boat is now drifting. And the shepherd boy and the damsel

there and then founded a new town beside the lake, and all who are of the old families of Baile Loch Riabhach, like myself, are their descendants. That, concluded Eamonn, is the story of the Gray Lake.

THE BUILDING

I

MARTIN COSGRAVE walked up steadily to his holding after Ellen Miscal had read to him the American letter. He had spoken no word to the woman. It was not every day that he had to battle with a whirl of thoughts. A quiet man of the fields, he only felt conscious of a strong impulse to get back to his holding up on the hill. He had no clear idea of what he would do or what he would think when he got back to his holding. But the fields seemed to cry out to him, to call him back to their companionship, while all the wonders of the resurrection were breaking in fresh upon his life.

Martin Cosgrave walked his fields and put his flock of sheep scurrying out of a gap with a whistle. His holding and the things of his holding were never so precious to his sight. He walked his fields with his hands

in his pockets and an easy, solid step upon the sod. He felt a bracing sense of security.

Then he sat up on the mearing.

The day was waning. It seemed to close in about his holding with a new protection. The mood grew upon him as the shadows deepened. A great peace came over him. The breeze stirring the grass spread out at his feet seemed to whisper of the strange unexpected thing that had broken in upon his life. He felt the splendid companionship of the fields for the master.

Suddenly Martin Cosgrave looked down at his cabin. Something snapped as his eyes remained riveted upon it. He leapt from the mearing and walked out into the field, his hands this time gripping the lapels of his coat, a cloud settling upon his brow. In the centre of the field he stood, his eyes still upon the cabin. What a mean, pokey, ugly little dirty hovel it was! The thatch was getting scraggy over the gables and sagging at the back. In the front it was sodden. A rainy brown streak reached down to the little window looking like the claw of a great bird upon the walls. He had been letting everything go to the bad,

That might not signify in the past. But now——

"Rose Dempsey would never stand the like," he said to himself. "She will be used to grand big houses."

He turned his back upon the cabin near the boreen and looked up to the belt of beech trees swaying in the wind on the crest of the hill. How did he live there most of his life and never see that it was a place fashioned by the hand of Nature for a house? Was it not the height of nonsense to have trees there making music all the long hours of the night without a house beside them and people sleeping within it? In a few minutes the thought had taken hold of his mind. Limestone—beautiful limestone—ready at hand in the quarry not a quarter of a mile down the road. Sand from the pit at the back of his own cabin. Lime from the kiln beyond the road. And his own two hands! He ran his fingers along the muscles of his arms. Then he walked up the hill.

Martin Cosgrave, as he walked up the hill, felt himself wondering for the first time in his life if he had really been foolish to have run away from his father's cabin

when he had been young. Up to this he had always accepted the verdict of the people about him that he had been a foolish boy "to go wandering in strange places." He had walked along the roads to many far towns. Then he had struck his friend, the building contractor. He had been a useful worker about a building house. At first he had carried hods of mortar and cement up ladders to the masons. The business of the masons he had mastered quickly. But he had always had a longing to hold a chisel in one hand and a mallet in the other at work upon stone. He had drifted into a quarry, thence to a stone-cutting yard. After a little while he could not conceal his impatience with the mere dressing of coping stones or the chiselling out of tombstones to a pattern. Then he saw the man killed in the quarry. He was standing quite near to him. The chain of the windlass went and the poor man had no escape. Martin Cosgrave had heard the crunch of the skull on the boulder, and some of the blood was spattered upon his boots. He was a man of tense nerves. The sight of blood sickened him. He put

on his coat, left the quarry, and went walking along the road.

It was while he walked along the road that the longing for his home came upon him. He tramped back to his home above Kilbeg. His father had been long dead, but by his return he had glorified the closing days of his mother's life. He took up the little farm and cut himself off from his wandering life when he had fetched the tools from his lodgings in the town beside the quarries.

By the time Martin Cosgrave had reached the top of the hill he had concluded that he had not, after all, been a foolish boy to work in far places. "The hand of God was in it," he said reverently with his eyes on the beech trees that made music on the crest of the hill.

He made a rapid survey of the place with his keen eyes. Then he mapped out the foundation of the building by driving the heel of his boot into the green sod. He stepped back among the beech trees and looked out at the outlined site of the building. He saw it all growing up in his mind's eye, at first a rough block, a mere shell, a little uncertain and unsatisfactory.

Then the uncertainties were lopped off, the building took shape, touch after touch was added. Long shadows spread out from the trees and wrapped the fields. Stars came out in the sky. But Martin Cosgrave never noticed these things. The building was growing all the time. There was a firm grasp of the general scheme, a realisation of what the building would evolve that no other building ever evolved, what it would proclaim for all time. The passing of the day and the stealth of the night could not claim attention from a man who was living over a dream that was fashioning itself in his mind, abandoning himself to the joy of his creation, dwelling longingly upon the details of the building, going over and, as it were, feeling it in every fibre, jealous of the effect of every stone, tracing the trend and subtlety of every curve, seeing how one touch fitted in and enhanced the other and how all carried on the meaning of the whole.

When he came down from the hill there was a spring in Martin Cosgrave's step. He swung his arms. The blood was coursing fast through his veins. His eyes were glowing. He would need to make a

map of the building. It was all burned clearly into his brain.

From under the bed of his cabin he pulled out the wooden box. It had not been opened since he had fetched it from the far town. He held his breath as he threw open the lid. There they lay, the half-forgotten symbols of his old life. Worn mallets, chisels, the head of a broken hod with the plaster still caked into it, a short broad shovel for mixing mortar, a trowel, a spirit level, a plumb, all wrapped loosely in a worn leather apron. He took the mallets in his hand and turned them about with the quick little jerks that came so naturally to him. Strength for the work had come into his arms. All the old ambitions which he thought had been stifled with his early manhood sprang to life again.

As he lay in his bed that night Martin Cosgrave felt himself turning over and over again the words in the letter which Rose Dempsey had sent to her aunt, Ellen Miscal, from America. "Tell Martin Cosgrave," the letter read, "that I will be back home in Kilbeg by the end of the spring. If he has no wish for any other girl I am willing to settle down." Beyond the

announcement that her sister Sheela would be with her for a holiday, the letter "brought no other account." But what an account it had brought to Martin Cosgrave! The fields understood—the building would proclaim.

Early in the morning Martin Cosgrave went down to Ellen Miscal to tell her what to put in the letter that was going back to Rose Dempsey in America. Martin Cosgrave walked heavily into the house and stood with his back against the dresser. He turned the soft black hat about in his hands nervously and talked like one who was speaking sacred words.

"Tell her," he said, "that Martin Cosgrave had no thought for any other person beyond herself. Tell her to be coming back to Kilbeg. Tell her not to come until the late harvest."

Ellen Miscal, who sat over the sheet of writing paper on the table, looked up quickly as he spoke the words. As she did so she was conscious of the new animation that vivified the idealistic face of Martin Cosgrave. But he did not give her time to question him.

"I have my own reasons for asking her

to wait until the harvest," he said, with some irritation.

He stayed at the dresser until Ellen Miscal had written the letter. He carried it down to the village and posted it with his own hand, and he went and came as gravely as if he had been taking part in some solemn ritual.

II

That day the building was begun. Martin Cosgrave tackled the donkey and drew a few loads of limestone from the nearby quarry. Some of the neighbours who came his way found him a changed man, a silent man with his eager face set, a man in whose eyes a new light shone, a quiet man of the fields into whose mind a set purpose had come. He struggled up the road with his donkey-cart, his hand gripping the shaft to hasten the steps of the slow brute, his limbs bent to the hill, his head down at the work. By the end of the week a pile of grey-blue stones was heaped up on the crest of the hill. The walls of the fields had

been broken down to make a carway. Late into the night when the donkey had been fed and tethered the neighbours would see Martin Cosgrave moving about the pile of grey-blue stones, sorting and picking, arranging in little groups to have ready to his hands. "A house he is going to put up on the hill," they would say, lost in wonder.

The spring came, and with it all the strenuous work on the land. But Martin Cosgrave went on with the building. The neighbours shook their heads at the sight of neglect that was gathering about his holding; they said it was flying in the face of Providence when Martin Cosgrave weaned all the lambs from the ewes one day, long before their time, and sold them at the fair to the first bidder that came his way. Martin Cosgrave did so because he wanted money and was in a hurry to get back to his building.

"What call has a man to be destroying himself like that?" the neighbours asked each other.

Martin Cosgrave knew what the neighbours were saying about him. But what did he care? What thought had any of

them for the heart of a builder? What did any of them know beyond putting a spade in the clay and waiting for the seasons to send up growing things from the seed they scattered by their hands? What did they know about the feel of the rough stone in the hand and the shaping of it to fit into the building, the building that day after day you saw rising up from the ground by the skill of your hand and the art of your mind? What could they in Kilbeg know of the ship that would plough the ocean in the harvest bearing Rose Dempsey home to him? For all their ploughing and their sowing, what sort of a place had any of them led a woman into? They might talk away. The joy of the builder was his. The beech trees that made music all day beside the building he was putting up to the sight of all the world had more understanding of him than all the people of the parish.

Martin Cosgrave had no help. He kept to his work from such an early hour in the morning until such a late hour of the night that the people marvelled at his endurance. But as the work went on the people would talk about Martin Cosgrave's building in the fields and tell strangers of it at the

markets. They said that the like of it had never been seen in the countryside. It was to be "full of little turrets and the finest of fancy porches and a regular sight of bulging windows." One day that Martin Cosgrave heard a neighbour speaking about the "bulging windows" he laughed a half-bitter, half-mocking laugh.

"Tell them," he said, "that they are cut-stone tracery windows to fit in with the carved doors." These cut-stone windows and carved doors cost Martin Cosgrave such a length of time that they provoked the patience of the people. Out of big slabs of stone he had worked them, and sometimes he would ask the neighbours to give him a hand in the shifting of these slabs. But he was quick to resent any interference. One day a stone-cutter from the quarry went up on the scaffold, and when Martin Cosgrave saw him he went white to the lips and cursed so bitterly that those standing about walked away.

When the shell of the building had been finished Martin Cosgrave hired a carpenter to do all the woodwork. The woodwork cost money. Martin Cosgrave did not hesitate. He sold some of his sheep, sold

them hurriedly, and as all men who sell their sheep hurriedly, he sold them badly. When the carpentry had been finished, the roofing cost more money. One day the neighbours discovered that all the sheep had been sold. "He's beggared now," they said.

The farmer who turned the sod a few fields away laboured in the damp atmosphere of growing things, his mind filled with thoughts of bursting seeds and teeming barns. He shook his head at sight of Martin Cosgrave above on the hill bent all day over hard stones; whenever he looked up he only caught the glint of a trowel, or heard the harsh grind of a chisel. But Martin Cosgrave took no stock of the men reddening the soil beneath him. Whenever his eyes travelled down the hill-side he only saw the flock of crows that hung over the head of the digger. The study of the veins of limestone that he turned in his hands, the slow moulding of the crude shapes to their place in the building, the rhythm and swing of the mallet in his arm, the zest with which he felt the impact of the chisel on the stone, the ring of forging steel, the consciousness

of mastery over the work that lay to his hands—these were the things that seemed to him to give life a purpose and man a destiny. He would whistle a tune as he mixed the mortar with the broad shovel, for it gave him a feeling of the knitting of the building with the ages. He pitied the farmer who looked helplessly upon his corn as it was beaten to the ground by the first storm that blew from the sea; he was upon a work that would withstand the storms of centuries. The scent of lime and mortar greeted his nostrils. When he moved about the splinters crunched under his feet. Everything around him was hard and stubborn, but he was the master of it all. In his dreams in the night he would reach out his hands for the feel of the hard stone, a burning desire in his breast to put it into shape, to give it nobility in the scheme of a building.

It was while Martin Cosgrave walked through the building that Ellen Miscal came to him with the second letter from America. The carpenter was hammering at something below. The letter said that Rose Dempsey and her sister, Sheela, would be home in the late harvest. "With all I saw

since I left Kilbeg," Rose Dempsey wrote, "I never saw one that I thought as much of as Martin Cosgrave."

When Ellen Miscal left him, Martin Cosgrave stood very quietly looking through the cut-stone tracery window. The beech trees were swaying slowly outside. Their music was in his ears.

Then he remembered that he was standing in the room where he would take Rose Dempsey in his arms. It was here he would tell her of all the bitter things he had locked up in his heart when she had gone away from him. It was here he would tell her of the day of resurrection, when all the bitter thoughts had burst into flower at the few words that told of her return. It was that day of great tumult within him that thought of the building had come into his mind.

When Martin Cosgrave walked out of the room the carpenter and a neighbour boy were arguing about something at the foot of the stairs.

"It's too steep, I'm telling you," the boy was saying.

"What do you know about it?"

"I know this much about it, that if a

little child came running down that stairs he'd be apt to fall and break his neck."

Then the two men went out, still arguing.

Martin Cosgrave sat down on one of the steps of the stairs. A child running down the steps! His child! A child bearing his name! He would be prattling about the building. He would run across that landing, swaying and tottering. His little voice would fill the building. Arms would be reaching out to him. They would be the soft white arms of Rose Dempsey, or maybe, they would be the arms that raised up the building—his own strong arms. Or it might be that he would be carrying down the child and handing him over the rails there into the outspread arms of Rose Dempsey. She would be reaching out for the child with the newly-kindled light of motherhood in her eyes, the passion of a young mother in her welcoming voice. A child with his very name—a child that would grow up to be a man and hand down the name to another, and so on during the generations. And with the name would go down the building, the building that would endure, that would live, that was immortal. Did it all come to him as a

sudden revelation, springing from the idle talk of a neighbour boy brought up to work from one season to another? Or was it the same thing that was behind the forces that had fired him while he had worked at the building? Had it not all come into his life the evening he stood among his fields with his eyes on the crest of the hill?

Ah, there had been a great building surely, a building standing up on the hill, a great, a splendid building raised up to the sight of all the world, and with it a greater building, a building raised up from the sight of all men, the building of a name, the moulding of hearts that would beat while Time was, a building of immortal souls, a building into which God would breathe His breath, a building which would be heard of in Heaven, among the angels, through all the eternities, a building living on when all the light was gone out of the sun, when oceans were as if they had never been, a name, a building, living when the story of all the worlds and all the generations would be held written upon a scroll in the lap of God. . . . The face of the dreamer as he abandoned himself to his

thoughts was pallid with a half-fanatical emotion.

The neighbours were more awed than shocked at the change they saw increasing in Martin Cosgrave. He had grown paler and thinner, but his eyes were more tense, had in them, some of the neighbours said, the colour of the limestone. He was more and more removed from the old life. He walked his fields without seeing the things that made up the old companionship. His whole attitude was one of detachment from everything that did not savour of the crunch of stone, the ring of steel on the walls of a building. He only talked rationally when the neighbours spoke to him of the building. They had heard that he had gone to the money-lender, and mortgaged every perch of his land. "It was easy to know how work of the like would end," they said.

One day a stranger was driving by on his car, and when he saw the building he got down, walked up the hill, and made a long study of it. On his way down he met Martin Cosgrave.

"Who built the house on the hill?" he asked.

"A simple man in the neighbourhood," Martin Cosgrave made answer, after a little pause.

"A simple man!" the stranger exclaimed, looking at Martin Cosgrave with some disapproval. "Well, he has attempted something anyway. He may not have succeeded, but the artist is in him somewhere. He has created a sort of—well, lyric—in stone on that hill. Extraordinary!"

The stranger hesitated before he hit on the word lyric. He got up on his car and drove away muttering something under his breath.

Martin Cosgrave could have run up the hill and shouted. He could have called all the neighbours together and told them of the strange man who had praised the building.

But he did none of these things. He had work waiting to his hand. A hunger was upon him to feel his pulse beating to the throb of steel on stone. From the road he made a sweep of a drive up to the building. The neighbours looked open-mouthed at the work for the days it went on. "Well,

that finishes Martin Cosgrave anyway," they said.

Martin Cosgrave rushed the making of the drive; he took all the help he could get. The boys would come up after their day's work and give him a hand. While they worked he was busy with his chisel upon the boulders of limestone which he had set up on either side of the entrance gate. Once more he felt the glamour of life—the impact of forging steel on stone was thrilling through his arms, the stone was being moulded to the direction of his exulting mind.

When he had finished with the boulders at the entrance gate the people marvelled. The gate had a glory of its own, and yet it was connected with the scheme of the building on the hill palpably enough for even their minds to grasp it. When the people looked upon it they forgot to make complaint of the good land that was given to ruin. One of them had expressed the general vague sentiment when he said, "Well, the kite has got its tail."

In the late harvest Martin Cosgrave carried up all the little sticks of furniture from his cabin and put it in the building. Then

he sent for Ellen Miscal. When the woman came she looked about the place in amazement.

"Well, of all the sights in the world!" she exclaimed.

Martin Cosgrave was irritated at the woman's attitude.

"We'll have to make the best of it," he said, looking at the furniture. "I will be marrying Rose Dempsey in the town some days after she lands."

"Rose would never like the suddenness of that," her aunt protested. "She can be staying with me and marrying from my house."

"I saw the priest about it," Martin Cosgrave said impatiently. "I will have my way, Ellen Miscal. Rose Dempsey will come up to Kilbeg my wife. We will come in the gate together, we will walk in to the building together. I will have my way."

Martin Cosgrave spoke of having his way in the impassioned voice of the fanatic, of his home-coming with his bride in the half-dreamy voice of the visionary.

"Have your way, Martin, have your way," the woman said. "And," she

added, rising, "I will be bringing up a few things to put into your house."

III

Martin Cosgrave spent three days in the town waiting the arrival of Rose Dempsey. The boat was late. He haunted the railway station, with hungry eyes scanned the passengers as each train steamed in. His blood was on fire in his veins for those three days. What peace could a man have who was waiting to get back to his building and to have Rose Dempsey going back with him, his wife?

Sometimes he would sit down on the railway bench on the platform, staring down at the ground, smiling to himself. What a surprise he had in store for Rose! What would he say to her first? Would he say anything of the building? No, he would say nothing at all of the building until they drove across the bridge and right up to the gate! "Rose," he would then say, "do you remember the hill—the place under the beech trees?" She was sure to remember that place. It was there they had spent so much time, there he had first found her

lips, there they had quarrelled! And Rose would look up to that old place and see the building! What would she think? Would she feel about it as he felt himself? She would, she would! What sort of look would come into her face? And what would he be able to tell her about it at all? . . . He would say nothing at all about it; that would be the best way! They would say nothing to each other, but walk in the gate and up the drive across the hill, the hill they often ran across in the old days! They would be quite silent, and walk into the house silently. The building, too, would be silent, and he would take her from one room to another in silence, and when she had seen everything he would look into her eyes and say, "Well?" It would be all so like a wonderful story, a day of magic! . . . Martin Cosgrave sprang from the bench and went to the edge of the platform, staring down the long level road, with its two rails tapering almost together in the distance. Not a sign of a train. Would it never come in? Had anything happened the boat? He walked up and down with energy, holding the lapel of his coat, saying to himself, "I must not be thinking of

things like this. It is foolishness. Whatever is to happen will happen, and that's all about it. I am quite at ease, quite cool!"

At last it came, steaming and blowing. Windows were lowered, carriage doors flew open, people ran up and down. Martin Cosgrave stood a little away, tense, drawn, his eyes sweeping down the people. Suddenly something shot through him; an old sensation, an old thrill, made his whole being tingle, his mind exult, and then there was the most exquisite relaxation. How long it was since he felt like this before! His eyes were burning upon a familiar figure that had come from a carriage, the figure of a girl in a navy blue coat and skirt, her back turned, struggling with parcels, helped by the hands of invisible people from within the carriage. Martin Cosgrave strode down the platform, eagerness, joy, sense of proprietorship, already in his stride.

"Rose!" he exclaimed while the girl's back was still turned to him.

His voice shook in spite of him. The woman turned about sharply.

Martin Cosgrave gave a little start back,

It was not Rose Dempsey, but her sister, Sheela. How like Rose she had grown!

"Martin!" she exclaimed, putting out her hand. He gave it a hurried shake and then searched the railway carriage with burning eyes. The people he saw there were all strangers, tired-looking travellers. When he turned from the railway carriage Sheela Dempsey was rushing with her parcels into a waiting-room. He strode after her. He looked at the girl. How unlike Rose she was after all! Nobody—nobody—could ever be like Rose Dempsey!

"Where is Rose?" he asked.

Sheela Dempsey looked up into the face of Martin Cosgrave and saw there what she had half-dreaded to see.

"Martin," she said, "Rose is not coming home."

Martin Cosgrave gripped the door of the waiting-room. The train whistled outside and glided from the station. He heard a woman's cheerful voice cry out a conventional "good-bye, good-bye," and through the window he saw the flutter of a dainty handkerchief. A truck was wheeled past the waiting-room. There was the crack of

a whip and some cars rattled away over the road. Then there was silence.

Sheela Dempsey walked over to him and laid a hand upon his shoulder. When she spoke her voice was full of an understanding womanly sympathy.

"Don't be troubling over it, Martin," she said, "Rose is not worth it." She spoke her sister's name with some bitterness.

Vaguely Martin Cosgrave looked into the girl's eyes. He read there in a dim way what the girl could not say of her sister.

It was all so strange! The waiting-room was so bare, so cold, so grey, so like a sepulchre. What could Sheela Dempsey with all her womanly understanding, with all her quick intuition, know of the things that happened beside her? How could she have ears for the crashing down of the pillars of the building that Martin Cosgrave had raised up in his soul? How could she have eyes for the wreck of the structure that was to go on through all the generations? What thought had she of the wiping out of a name that would have lived in the nation and continued for all time in the eternities, a tangible thing in Heaven

among the Immortals when the stars had all been burned out in the sky?

Martin Cosgrave drove home from the railway station with Sheela Dempsey. He sat without a word, not really conscious of his surroundings as they covered the miles. The girl reached across the side-car, touching him lightly on the shoulder.

"Look!" she exclaimed.

Martin Cosgrave looked up. The building stood in the moonlight on the crest of the hill. He bade the driver pull up, and then got down from the car.

"Who owns the house?" Sheela Dempsey asked.

"I do. I put it up on the hill for Rose."

There was silence for some time.

"How did you get it built, Martin?" Sheela Dempsey asked, awe in her tone.

"I built it myself," he answered. "I wonder has Rose as good a place? What sort of a building is she in to-night?"

Martin Cosgrave did not notice the sudden quiver in the girl's body as he put the question. But she made no reply, and the car drove on, leaving Martin Cosgrave standing alone at the gate of the building.

The faint sweep of the drive lay before

him. It led his eyes up to the crest of the hill. There it was standing shadowy against the sky, every delicate outline clear to his vision. The beech trees were swaying beside it, reaching out like great shapeless arms in the night, blurred and beckoning and ghostly. A little vein of their music sounded in his ears. How often had he listened to that music and the things it had sung to him! It made him conscious of all the emotion he had felt while he had put up the building on the hill.

The joy of the builder swept over him like a wave. He was within the rising walls again, his hands among the grey-blue shapes, the measured stroke of the mallet swinging for the shifting chisel, the throb of steel going through his arms, the grind of stone was under his hands, the stone dust dry upon his lips, his eyes quick and keen, his arms bared, the shirt at his breast open, his whole body tense, tuned, to the desire of the conscious builder. . . . Once more he moved about the carpet of splinters, the grateful crunch beneath his feet, his world a world of stubborn things, rejoicing in his power of direction and mastery over it all. And always at the back

of his mind and blending itself with the work was the thought of a ship forging through the water at the harvest, a ship with white sails spread to the winds. Had not thought for the building come into his mind when dead things sprang to life in the resurrection of his hopes?

Martin Cosgrave turned away from the gate. He walked down where the shadow of the mearing was faint upon the road. He turned up the boreen closed in by the still hedges. He stumbled over the ruts. He stood at the cabin door and looked up at the sky with soulless eyes. The animation, the inspiration, that had vivified his face since the building had been begun had died. The face no longer expressed the idealist, the visionary. His eyes swept the sky for a purpose. It was the look of the man of the fields, the man who had thought for his crops, who was near to the soil.

He had not looked a final and anxious, a peasant look, at the sky from his cabin-door in the night since he had embarked upon the building. He was conscious of that fact after a little. He wondered if it was a vague stirring in his heart that made

him do it, a vague craving for the old companionship of the fields this night of bitterness. They were the fields, the sod, the territory of his forefathers, the inheritance of his blood. Who was he that he should put up a great building on the hill? What if he had risen for a little on his wings above the common flock?

The night air was heavy with the scent of the late dry harvest and all that the late dry harvest meant to the man nurtured on the side of a wet hill. The sheaves of corn were stooked in his neighbour's fields. Yesterday he had sacrificed the land to the building; to-morrow he would sacrifice the building to the land. Martin Cosgrave knew, the stars seemed to know, that a message, a voice, a command, would come like a wave through the generations of his blood sweeping him back to a common tradition. The cry for service on the land was beginning to stir somewhere. It would come to him in a word, a word sanctified upon the land by the memory of a thousand sacrifices and a thousand struggles, the only word that held magic for his race, the one word—Redemption! He looked up at the building, made a vague motion of his hand

that was like an act of renunciation, and laughed a laugh of terrible bitterness.

"Look," he cried, "at the building Martin Cosgrave put up on the hill!"

He moved to the cabin-door, his feet heavy upon the uneven ground as the feet of any of the generations of men who had ever gone that way before. He pressed the cabin-door with his fist. With a groan it went back shakily over the worn stone threshold, sticking when it was only a little way open. All was quiet, black, damp, terrible as chaos, inside. Martin Cosgrave hitched forward his left shoulder, went in sideways, and closed the crazy door against the pale world of moonlight outside.

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